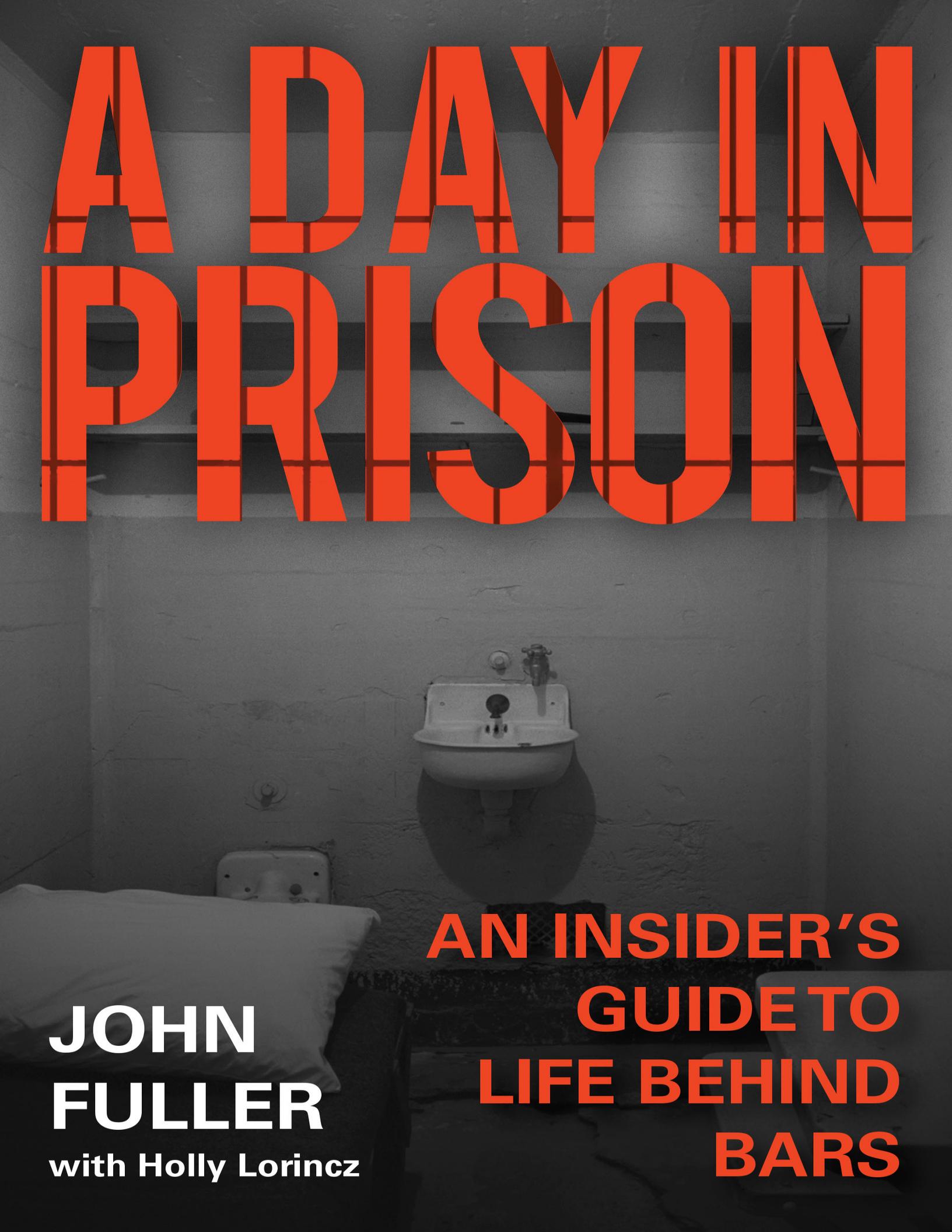


# A DAY IN PRISON



AN INSIDER'S  
GUIDE TO  
LIFE BEHIND  
BARS

**JOHN  
FULLER**  
with Holly Lorincz

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Skyhorse Publishing

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**NOTE:**

This book's information applies to both male and female inmates, but since less than 10 percent of federal prisoners are women, the examples tend to be male and the pronouns are masculine.

# Contents

Introduction

Processing A New Convict

Entry Checklist

A Typical Daily Schedule

The Ten Prison Commandments

## PART I

## YOUR DAY BEHIND BARS

<b>CH 1</b>	<b>5 A.M.</b>	<b>WAKING UP IN A CELL</b> Privacy, bunks, toilet, hygiene, morning exercise, Ten-Minute Move, trust
<b>CH 2</b>	<b>6 A.M.</b>	<b>THE CAFETERIA</b> Lines, eye contact, body language, seating arrangements, table manners, managing diseases, weight, the guards, fighting
<b>CH 3</b>	<b>7 A.M.</b>	<b>THE SHOWER AND LAUNDRY</b> Personal space, protecting self, towels, infections, clothes, theft
<b>CH 4</b>	<b>8 A.M.</b>	<b>WORK</b> Work ethic, Unicor, side hustles, killing time, jobs, outside training
<b>CH 5</b>	<b>2 P.M.</b>	<b>EXERCISE</b>

		Physical and mental health, strength, weight room, gangs, defense
		<b>VISITATION / PHONE CALLS</b>
<b>CH 6</b>	<b>3 P.M.</b>	Contact rules, visitation rooms, gifts, eavesdropping, betrayal
		<b>CLASSES / SELF-HELP GROUPS / BIBLE STUDIES/COUNSELING</b>
<b>CH 7</b>	<b>4 P.M.</b>	Grief, using time, managing addictions, religion, patience, suicide prevention
		<b>THE COMMISSARY</b>
<b>CH 8</b>	<b>6 P.M.</b>	Accounts, useful items, stamps, weapons
		<b>SOCIALIZING</b>
<b>CH 9</b>	<b>7 P.M.</b>	Bartering, drugs, gambling, tattoos, TV, computers, library, snitching
		<b>SLEEPING IN A CELL</b>
<b>CH 10</b>	<b>8 P.M.</b>	Meditation, reading, praying, crying, quiet, sleep

	<b>MORE STORIES AND ADVICE</b>
	<b>JUVENILE INMATES</b>
<b>CH 11</b>	Safety and education
	<b>THE FAMILIES</b>
<b>CH 12</b>	Self-surrendering, children, money, contact, coming home
	<b>GOOD BEHAVIOR VS. BAD BEHAVIOR</b>
<b>CH 13</b>	Good conduct time, disciplinary sanctions, parole board

## Glossary

[Resources For Inmates](#)

[Resources For Female Inmates](#)

[Resources For Families Of Inmates](#)

# Introduction

**E**VERYONE SHOULD UNDERSTAND the brutal reality of living behind bars. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in every two hundred Americans is sent to prison. With these kinds of numbers, it may not be *you* going to jail, but there's a good chance you know someone who has been incarcerated, or he's on his way there. This person may even be a white-collar criminal or suburban drug dealer—someone who's never spent time on the street. Unfortunately, the culture on the *inside* is an intensified version of the culture prevalent in our nation's most chaotic and violent neighborhoods. Office rules don't apply. The snapping of fingers to get your coffee is behind you. Nor do soccer-mom rules apply. No one is going to politely listen if you kvetch and complain. You may be a Master of the Universe in your nine-to-five world, but that just puts you more at risk on the inside, where the cell blocks are run by men and women who deal only in respect—a respect maintained through violence.

## FROM A PAST INMATE

Unfortunately, I spent eleven years in high, medium, and low security institutions around the country, so I know all too well of which I speak. I had to learn the ropes the very hard way.

A reporter from *Loaded Magazine* once asked what it was like when I first went in. I was honest and told him that I tried to beat the system, thought I was bigger and better than the others. I tried to do things my own way. I let anger rule me. For a while, I ran with a group of other inmates, violent guys, many of whom were known for going around and stabbing other inmates. The fights were dangerous. And all the fighting got me

kicked out of numerous prisons. Finally, I realized that when I stopped trying to buck the rules, when I let myself just be a cog, my time was easier.

While on the inside, I saw too many men unwilling to conform to the prison culture, drowning in rage, or unable to withstand depression; almost a third of the deaths in prison are attributed to suicide. Others, like me, resorted to violence, often irrationally. Obeying the institutionalized inmate rules, and my own advice, can possibly save your life—but only if you are willing to abandon the belief that you are tougher, wealthier, smarter, or more privileged than your fellow inmates. The street-level hustlers and gangbangers (who, on the outside, were snubbed by the rich and middle class driving their luxury cars into gated communities) are now respected, feared, and admired as leaders; their thirst for confrontation, intimidation, and violence permeates the air. They run the show, no questions asked. Don't be fooled: you can be seriously injured or killed for breaking a rule you don't even realize exists, much less refusing to show respect.

The environment inside jails and prisons varies according to the security levels (low, medium, or high security institutions). The culture of the inmates who have an influence in these facilities, and the staff members who run them, will also differ. But once you get a grasp for the basic rules by which prison culture operates, you should be able to adapt the suggestions in this book as needed, whether in a county jail or a high security prison.

But there is one more thing to consider ...

## **A DAY IN PRISON FEELS LIKE A LIFETIME**

Standing in line. Staring at a wall. Sitting in a cell. Wishing for a visit. Waiting for a letter. Wanting a caress from a loved one.

Tick ... Tock.

Tick ... Tock.

Tick ... Tock.

A minute drags by like an hour. That hour drags by like a day. If you're behind bars, facing a ten-year sentence ... well, time is your enemy. Abiding by the rules will help you survive, but patience is something just as important. Einstein claimed time passes quickly when sitting with a pretty girl, but minutes slow to what feels like hours when you are in pain—or bored. If you're headed off to jail, you're about to prove Einstein's theory of relativity to yourself.

In order to come out of this on the other side as a whole and sane person, pay attention, keep your guard up, and start breathing deeply—inhaling calm and exhaling the rage. You can't force the guards to open the doors, the lines to move forward, the second hand on the clock to move any faster ... you can only control your response. That response needs to be based on patience or you will go crazy.

It will help to know what's ahead of you. On the following pages, you will find chapters devoted to breaking down a typical day in your average prison, offering stories, advice, and rules that correlate to the activities appropriate to that time of day. It's important to realize the hourly breakdown is figurative, since every prison is different ... and, frankly, daily schedules can be changed at any time, thanks to lockdowns and head counts. But the basic elements don't change, like waking up in a cell, going to the cafeteria, taking a shower, etc. (only the scheduled times vary from prison to prison), so you will easily be able to take the information and apply it to your own particular situation or schedule.

This book also has tips on how best to help your family from the inside, how to maintain relationships, and how they can help you. In addition, there is a list of resources in the back, offering information to help the family financially, emotionally, and socially. One more reason to stay alive and come out healthy is your family.

## **STAY STRONG**

This does not have to be the end of your life. It's a weigh station. Stay patient. Stay strong. See you on the other side, brother.

—*Doc Fuller*

# Processing a New Convict

THESE ARE THE usual steps taken once you are found guilty and become state property:

1. You will be housed in the municipal county jail where the crime was committed. You will wait for a transfer to a correctional institution, the security level\* to be determined by your criminal history and the sentencing guidelines. This generally takes about a month but can take longer.
2. You will likely then be taken to a transfer facility, where you will be held until the next bus, van, or airplane is available for transport. Your intake papers will be prepared during this time. You may be at a transfer facility or a holding unit for up to six months, maybe longer, waiting for your permanent placement. Prisoners at this stage of the process are disinfected, inspected thoroughly for contraband (this includes a cavity search), and issued orange uniforms.
3. You will be assigned and transferred to a housing unit or block in a minimum, medium, or maximum security facility, anywhere in the United States where there is space. The Federal Bureau of Prisons can transfer you to another prison at anytime due to disciplinary infractions, overcrowding, or change in your custody status. Prisoners at this stage are again disinfected, inspected thoroughly for contraband, and issued clothes to match the color of the rest of the convict population in that facility, usually beige or dark green. Prison jobs are usually assigned at this time, so you will be physically and mentally evaluated.
4. Six months prior to your release date, you will be considered for a halfway house placement to finish out your time. Sometimes you may

be offered limited counseling for addiction or work rehabilitation. You will be given a set of clothes, a bus ticket, an inmate identification card, and a Social Security card upon release.

*\*Security Levels*

Minimum-security Federal Prison Camp or Satellite Camp (FPC or SCP)

Low-security Federal Correctional Institution (FCI)

Medium-security Federal Correctional Institution (FCI)

High-security United States Penitentiary (USP)

Administrative Maximum Security (ADX)

Administrative Facilities (FMC, FTC, FDC)

# Entry Checklist

YOU ARE ALLOWED to enter a federal prison with only a few possessions:

- A two-day supply of medication in its original container
- Plain wedding band (no stones or intricate markings)
- Earrings, females only, (no stones) with a declared value of less than \$100
- Medical or orthopedic devices (must be pre-approved by prison)
- Legal documents
- Religious items, as long as they do not present a threat to the security of the institution; religious medallions and chains must have a declared value of less than \$100
- Prescription eyeglasses

# **A Typical Daily Schedule**

## **AT A MEDIUM SECURITY FACILITY**

**T**HE DAILY SCHEDULE of an inmate varies from prison to prison; from low, medium, and high security facilities; from block to block within the prison; and from day to day depending on the number of lockdowns and head counts. Below, you'll find a generalized example of how prisoners are moved throughout their day, in specified blocks or dorms at a time. They are usually only allowed to relocate when the loudspeaker or bell announces a Ten-Minute Move. Head counts occur regularly throughout the day. A prisoner must stand in place for the 4:00 p.m. dorm count.

### **CELL BLOCK A**

5:00 a.m.	optional morning prayer
5:30	lights on
6:00	breakfast
7:00	exercise, morning prayer, reading
7:30	shower
8:00	work
11:00	lunch
12:00 p.m.	work
2:00	exercise, shower, laundry
3:00	visitation, self-help group, or college class
4:00	head count
4:30	dinner
5:00	more education or therapy opportunities
6:00	use phone, socialize, watch TV

9:00 locked back in cell, read, write

The following chapters break down a typical schedule, explain the unwritten expectations you will encounter throughout any given day, and provide rules and tips for survival.

# The Ten Prison Commandments

RESPECT YOUR FELLOW INMATES  
DO NOT TRUST YOUR FELLOW INMATES  
RESPECT THE STAFF  
DO NOT STARE  
MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS  
DO NOT STEAL  
DO NOT SNITCH  
DO NOT USE DRUGS  
DO NOT GAMBLE  
AVOID PRISON GANGS

## PART I

# **Your Day Behind Bars**

# CHAPTER 1

## WAKING UP IN A CELL

5 A.M.

THE CRIMINAL SLEEPING on the bunk below you in your six-by-nine-foot cell is still sleeping. You're going to want to sit up slowly and try not to creak the metal springs under the thin cotton mattress. You have no idea if the guy below you is a murderer. He may have stabbed his last cell mate. You don't want to start the day getting thrown against a cement wall.

I think this first morning is the toughest. In 1993, at the age of twenty-nine, I was charged with conspiracy to distribute cocaine, leading to a ten-year sentence in federal prison. No amount of reading or talking to ex-cons can help you wrap your mind around waking up to discover you've got a hard pillow under your head, a thin wool blanket replacing your goose down comforter, and a gray ceiling a foot above your face. And it's not your favorite radio station that's awakened you—it's a goddamn loudspeaker. I almost had a stroke the first time I had a jailhouse alarm go off next to my head. I woke up thinking an air-raid siren was going off.

The first thing to do when you wake up behind bars is to accept responsibility. You are here because of choices you made. More importantly, accept reality. You are here. No one cares if you're innocent or not. Make the choice to do your time quietly and patiently, or suffer further

consequences. Your choices now can't erase your sentence, but they can make it shorter and help you survive.

So, wake up and just breathe, in and out.

Inmates have a code, a set of unwritten rules everyone lives by—or they pay the price. Prison culture is institutionalized. You're not going to change tradition or practices, but you can get yourself beaten, raped, or killed if you don't fall in line—even if you *accidentally* disrespect someone or break a rule. There's not a lot of compassion or empathy on the inside; that, too, can get you killed. A guy sitting on the toilet can receive a swift kick to the chest because he's used the rest of the toilet paper. That's an impromptu lesson in prison behavior you don't want. Remember, what seems normal on the outside is not the norm for a group of men living in a cage together.

So listen up. The following is meant to give you a feeling for what it's really like inside—what the prisoners live with day after day. If you are on your way to prison for the first time, there are only three things that can ease your time behind bars: *patience, being respectful of others, and learning the inmates' rules immediately*. In the following chapters, you will find rules and tips and tricks to help you maneuver through an average day in the average penitentiary; the hourly schedule may differ slightly from prison to prison, but you will get the gist of how you will spend your day.

I wish I'd had this book before I went in. When I was first taken into custody, they stuck me in the county jail in Paris, Kentucky. Right from the get-go, I had a bad attitude, refusing to talk to anyone. My cell mate, or "cellie," would ignore me, though he'd often use my bed to leverage himself to hop onto the top bunk. I didn't say anything at first, even when he stepped on my leg several times without an apology. I finally asked him to stop but he continued to ignore me, clearly using this as an intimidation tactic. He mistook my quiet manner for weakness. But one day, I let my rage get the better of me. I snatched my cellie off the top bed, slammed him to the floor, and stomped on him.

Some officers saw me. They sounded the alarm and stormed into our dorm. I was smart enough to immediately turn around and put my hands behind my back. Two of the four officers grabbed me and led me away, asking why I assaulted the guy. I responded, "I will not tolerate being disrespected by anyone in your county jail." Their response was, "We will not tolerate assaults between inmates." And they placed me in The Hole.

This means I was in an isolation cell, officially known as Administrative Segregation, for twenty-three hours a day for nearly three weeks. That's a lot of time alone. People can go crazy.

But even this wake-up call did nothing to alter my actions. I refused to adjust to the prison culture, even getting kicked out of various prisons for violent confrontations. As I said, I had to learn the hard way.

Okay, so now your poor, sorry self has woken up in General Population, unless they've stuck you in in a private cell until they can place you. Don't get comfortable—you *will* have a cell mate, if not six or seven. In the mornings, your “cellie” may be reading, writing, or sleeping. Leave him alone.

Let's start with getting out of bed. Your cellie will not like being kicked in the head. If you're on the top bunk (and as New Guy, you probably are), shimmy over the side, careful to control the swing of your legs, and do it quietly. Your cellie knows he's got to be up soon if he wants to get something from the cafeteria, but you'll probably have the first shift at the sink and toilet; he'll most likely want to sleep a little longer—but if he gets up, you sit your ass back down. It's only polite. So brush your teeth and wash your face, careful to run the water only when absolutely necessary—even though it's noisy as hell all around you, with the sound of flushing, spitting, random yelling, etc., coming from your cell block. You'll get used to that, it'll become white noise, unless you've got a screamer or a sobber close to you.

One of the biggest tests of respect is based on the use of the toilet. That may sound crazy now, but we're all used to privacy. If Cellie thinks for one instant you are disrespecting him, you're done. And “done” means you can kiss your ass good-bye. If you are in a facility where inmates are locked down and you must use the cell toilet, let your cell mate know before you go. At the very least, tuck your sheet under the edge of the top mattress and let it hang to create a privacy barrier—though, again, you're going to want to ask permission first, unless he's asleep. Your cellie doesn't have to watch you squat on the toilet. You had better flush the toilet immediately and often to avoid smelling up the joint. Using the toilet is something that cannot be avoided, but it can be done with respect, and respect is everything in prison. The inmates are not your buddies from high school; if they feel disrespected, they may try to kill you while you are on the toilet with your pants down. Believe me, it's happened.

And speaking of pants, put your clothes on immediately. It's disrespectful to walk around in your tighty-whities, and you will be mocked. Wear boxers over them. You'll most likely be given orange scrubs when you're first transferred to your facility, so put those on. You will receive beige clothes (or whatever drab color the prison uses) when you are transferred from holding to your permanent housing unit. Regardless of the color of your clothes, make sure you put on your shoes or shower flip-flops before walking around. The fungus you can pick up from the floor (especially the shower floor) is no joke. I saw it; it's gross.

*Do not* use your cell mate's soap, razor, toothbrush, deodorant, or towel. Not only will this most likely result in violence, you can get MRSA (staff infections), which runs rampant through jails. It's hard to get rid of, it's painful, and it can kill you. Further, according to the Center for Disease Control, one in seven inmates is living with HIV.

I was incarcerated with Ray, a guy in his sixties who had injected drugs intravenously in the seventies and eighties, and was then diagnosed with HIV while in prison. He told me when he found out he was HIV positive he tried to bite correctional officers, to pass on the virus. He was one of the first inmates in the country to be charged with attempted murder by deliberating trying to infect a correctional officer. He'd been on an experimental HIV drug for at least eight years by the time I met him, and he actually looked pretty phenomenal for a sick guy, playing handball every day. He had very long gray and black dreadlocks and kept his color by letting the sun beat down on him regardless of the temperature. But I was always careful around him. I definitely wouldn't have shared a water bottle or a towel.

Besides HIV, prisons see a much higher rate of sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, and hepatitis. I can't tell you how many dudes I know who came out of prison with at least one disease that no simple dose of antibiotics was gonna' cure. Don't share your water bottles or razors.

Respect your cell mate's property. This was his home prior to your arrival, so do not comment or ask questions about his personal belongings or his habits. Do not take it upon yourself to read his personal mail, magazines, or newspapers. Don't even think about eating his food, or ask to do so. Your cell mate may not have much, so do not bother with what little he does have. Do not be shocked if your cellie's underwear and socks are hanging on a makeshift clothesline (a portion of torn bedsheet, usually half

an inch thick) next to your head. Don't say a word. You'll be doing the same thing soon enough, since you are provided with a limited amount of clothes (and you must wear the socks, underwear, pants, and shirts they give you or what you can buy at the commissary), and you usually only get to wash your clothes and bedding once a week. You can be penalized if your clothes are not clean or if you've written on them and, if you stink, the other inmates will have no problem sharing their displeasure.

As I said, you'll probably be stuck on the top bunk, since the bottom bunk is generally preferable and has most likely been taken by your cell mate. Do not ask to switch, do not complain. He's been there longer than you. Respect that. It will be a hassle to get in and out of bed if you're heavyset or not feeling well, but you're going to have to deal with that. There's no one there to take care of you, either, so you will need to make up your bed, neatly, before you leave your cell. You'll want to keep blankets, sheets, pillows, and mattress on the bunk at all times. Tidiness is monitored by the guards, but no cell mate wants to deal with your mess, either. If you were a pig before you went to jail, that ends now. No one else is going to put your socks in the laundry bag or pick up your empty potato chip bag.

If morning exercise is your thing, it's considerate to tell your cellie before you start the push-ups, the sit-ups, and the grunting. Otherwise, you'll want to wait for your cell doors to be unlocked and the announcement for the Ten-Minute Move to blare from the loudspeaker, at which time you can go to the weight room or the exercise yard (depending on the facility). Exercise is important in the joint, for your mental health as much as your physical health, but we'll get more into that later.

You're going to want to ask him why he's there. Don't. Refrain from inquiring why he is in prison, when he is getting out, or where he is from. He may provide that information when he feels comfortable with you. At some point, you and your cellie *will* likely fall into friendly conversation. But always remember: *no one in prison is your friend*. Do not trust that anyone has your back, no matter how close you think you are to a cell mate, or anyone else. It's survival of the fittest. An inmate might be manipulating you to get you to buy things for him, or even to conduct "business" for him.

I recall Eddie Antar, the former owner of Crazy Eddie's Electronics stores. He was wealthy and everyone on the inside knew it. When he was first placed in Fairton, New Jersey, he was too nice and quickly became the target for extortion. He eventually grew tired of that and began fighting

back. He stopped buying anyone anything from commissary or letting himself get bullied into giving up his phone privileges. By standing up for himself, he eventually earned the respect of a lot of inmates.

By all means, be friendly, but remain logical and controlled when it comes to sharing personal details or favors. And be aware that while snitches are universally despised, they exist. Prison is a jungle full of predators. This means the first person who tries to help you will likely have an ulterior motive. You will be in a vulnerable state emotionally. After all, you've left your family, friends, and trusted associates behind. You are the equivalent of a newborn, because you have no experience in your new environment, and there's absolutely no one you can turn to. Seasoned inmates recognize this, and they will be quick to exploit your weaknesses.

If not your cell mate, someone else at some point in the day will probably ask you questions such as "Where are you from?" "How much time do you have?" or "What are you in for?" Then you are likely to hear the infamous follow-up questions: "Do you want some snacks, deodorant, shampoo, sneakers, or stamps?" Your answer to each of these questions should be a firm "No." You absolutely do not want to owe anybody anything, ever.

Women tend to want to bond more than men. Do not give into this impulse, not at first. Be pleasant, network, but don't trust anyone with secrets, weaknesses, or information regarding how much money you have in your prison account. Do not talk about where you live, or the daily schedules of your family.

If you've been placed in a low security facility, you might think you have it easier, that you might be safer. Think again. Though you'll be in a bigger space, it's a shared space and now you have more personalities to contend with. You might be in a cell with six guys, or even an open-dorm room. Pay attention to the people around you. Be quiet when you get up, and, again, if there's an open toilet, use it quickly and as quietly as possible, flushing often. When you are done dressing and taking care of your morning needs, make sure your personal items, including soap and toothpaste, are locked in your locker. Theft is prevalent in low security joints. If you are not assigned a lock, you can usually buy one in the commissary. Get one immediately.

And let me tell you, if you're a klepto, you better reboot your addiction before you hit your cell. Thieves are dealt with swiftly and harshly. And "harsh" in prison generally involves a lot of pain and possibly objects where you don't want them.

If you are cell-bound for most of the day, and you do have a roommate, it is essential you follow the tips listed above. And pay attention to what may or may not be a pet peeve of your cellie. If he can't stand you chewing with your mouth open, there is no need to antagonize him. Shut your mouth. On the other hand, if his mouth breathing is bothering you ... you still keep your mouth shut. Focus on something else.

I know what I'm talking about. When I was moved from FCI Fort Dix to FCI Fairton, I was placed in a ten-man room—which was really loud. My cell mates were all individuals who just happened to be into making prison wine, or wheeling and dealing in some sort of contraband. With that kind of industry comes a stream of customers. I was accustomed to going to bed early, but the constant traffic made that tough, as did a cellie named Michael, who was crazy loud—he had a voice that would carry in the jungle on a rainy night, and he was unfortunately in the bunk right below mine. He loved the attention, always reminiscing about his life as a gambler in Northern Philadelphia with his friends from the street, who were constantly coming by. They'd run their mouths like a gang of old women on weekly bingo night. The traffic routine in the room had long been established. I had to keep my mouth shut or suffer the consequences. I remained in that room for a few months before being placed in a two-man room, which felt like prison heaven if there were such a thing.

Patience will help you survive. Learn it. I wish I had.

# CHAPTER 2

## THE CAFETERIA

### 6 A.M.

THE DOOR TO your cell has been opened and the morning head count is complete. Your cell mate is probably sitting on his bed, slurping on generic instant oatmeal from the commissary, having cooked it in the decrepit microwave in the common room. You, on the other hand, do not have access to the commissary until your assigned day of the week comes around (and you'll be lucky if your funds are available), so if you want breakfast, you're going to have to make your bed, slip on your knock-off Crocs, and go to the cafeteria.

On that first morning back in 1993, when I left the relative security of my cell and entered into the large, open cafeteria jammed with hundreds of guys in beige, a handful in orange and only two men in blue ... well, I knew I was in trouble. My orange jump suit flagged me as fresh meat. The guys I passed stared me down or jeered, and I felt rage tingling in my head, making my hands curl into fists. No one in there had my back, since I didn't know anyone yet, but I refused to bow my head or lower my gaze, not wanting to look weak. However, that only served to get the attention of the bullies, who I ended up fighting later. You're going to need to learn how to carry yourself, coming off as nonconfrontational without looking like a pansy, especially when you're in a big open area like the cafeteria.

But let's talk about some other cafeteria basics first.

The cafeteria serves each section of the prison for a specific amount of time. These daily schedules can vary from prison to prison, some starting breakfast as early as 4:30 a.m. At my first institution, all the blocks were served breakfast between 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m.; the tight scheduling exists so they can get hundreds of bodies through the food line, clean the tables and floors, and prepare for the next housing unit released for breakfast. Even though they weren't supposed to, some of the guards and the inmate cafeteria workers liked to stop serving early, so they could have a smoke break. I had to learn to get there on time or risk not eating. If you use the time to catch a few minutes of extra sleep, or to work out, realize you likely won't be able to eat again for hours. It certainly helps to have your locker stocked with snacks and instant oatmeal from the commissary for days like this.

The inmates' rules in the cafeteria, or in any of the shared spaces, are reinforced swiftly. It's a bad idea to be disrespectful to another prisoner at any time, accidentally or otherwise, but if you do it in front of others, the inmate will likely feel forced to retaliate in order to save face. The cafeteria, in particular, has a long-standing behavior code, and it is not what you are used to on the outside.

After a few days in, I thought I had it all figured out, keeping to myself with my mouth shut. I plunked my lunch tray down at a long table, half-filled with dudes minding their own business. The salt was in front of the guy next to me, within my reach. But when I went to snag it, he grabbed my hand and bent it back at an angle never intended by nature. I felt something pop but he let go before it broke, shoving my hand away. "Do that again, Fish, and you lose your !@# hand," he grunted and then went back to eating. I was seething but knew I couldn't go after him, not when he was surrounded by allies and I was just a "fish," an inmate new to prison life. I was lucky he took pity on the new guy and didn't break anything.

How was I supposed to know about the "no reaching across the table" rule? I realized then I needed to pay attention to every little thing, figure out how the other inmates were conducting themselves.

I must have heard "What are you looking at?" fifty times a day. It quickly became obvious, first and foremost, don't lock eyes with anyone. From the second you are arrested and put in a holding pen, you are no longer the top

dog in the room. You might have been dominant on the outside, able to stare down your peers in the office, or a bunch of frat boys in a bar, but the street thugs run the show now, and they give the beat downs. Inmates will stare at you and size you up when you first arrive at the prison, but do not return the favor. They know you are new to the joint, because they will see you carrying your bedroll—also called a fish kit, containing a blanket, sheet, underwear, T-shirts, socks, and pillowcase rolled up—to your cell or dorm.

And they notice inmates entering the shared spaces, like the cafeteria, looking nervous, scared, sad, or intimidated by the new environment. Try to control your face and avoid coming off as a weakling. We'd call these guys chumps. You can't help but look around, but do not hold eye contact for more than a second or two. Otherwise, inmates may interpret it as a challenge and assume you're going to try to assert dominance over them. Your stare could also be misconstrued as anger or dislike, and thrust you into an immediate world of hurt. Others may take your stare to mean you are interested in them sexually. Unless you are looking for that kind of attention, I suggest you look away. If you happen to catch someone's eye, mutter a casual "hey" and look away calmly, before they have a chance to say "What the !@#\$ are you looking at." Do not come off like you have an attitude. Otherwise, one after another, inmates will put you on their hit list and take action as a result of what you would consider an innocent locking of eyes on the outside.

As I said, your body posture is important. You don't want to slump or shuffle, look weak or cowardly, but you definitely don't want to look as if you're challenging someone's status. Walk relaxed and keep your head up. Keep your shoulders back but do not thrust out your chest or swagger. Again, don't let your eyes rest on someone for more than a heartbeat. Return a chin nod politely, but don't initiate the contact, not unless you know the person.

Do not ever cut in line. Most of the inmates you cut in front of will look to pay you a nasty visit before you digest your meal. Unlike on the outside, where friends allow you to hop in front of them in long lines at movie theatres, if you try this in prison, you're a dead man. On the inside, you line up for everything—the commissary, telephone, picking up or dropping off laundry, and waiting to see your counselor or case manager.

Few line-cutting confrontations occur outside of prison because most people do not wish to argue or fight in public. However, respect is the currency of prison society and men will fight to keep what they have, or to get what they don't. One morning while waiting in line for the microwave, I watched the guy from the cell next to mine throat punch a much bigger dude, just for stepping in line in front him. The guy who got punched was new. He'd stepped out of the line earlier, so he could go the bathroom, not realizing the other inmates took that as a sign he was forfeiting his spot.

Once you're through the chow line, you're going to need to find a seat. This is trickier than you think. It will seem racist at first, but eating arrangements in the cafeteria are set, and are not to be messed with. The races have established boundaries inside the shared spaces. Respect your race by sitting at a table with people of your color first, ethnicity second. The higher the security level at your facility, the more important this is. On the outside, this kind of enforced segregation would be shocking. Inside, it's the law of the jungle. It's the figurative water hole where inmates come to eat and drink. Learn from the lions, elephants, and hyenas, and stick to the boundaries of your pride. This group you are affiliated with is also called your tribe, or your car (the guys you ride with).

When I first came into the cafeteria, I'd watch where other African American inmates in my unit were gathering and sit with them. So, scour the room while you're still in line, note where people are sitting. If your housing unit has been called to eat first, and the tables are mostly empty, it may be difficult to ascertain where your race sits when you're new, so be careful. And, at the table, you still need to be careful who you're seen talking to. Don't get buddy-buddy with anyone right away; you need to stay aloof, not appear to be aligning with someone who you might not realize has a target on his back or who's a known snitch.

Admittedly, it's not always clear what ethnic group you might fit in with, especially if you are of mixed descent. There are not a lot of Asians or Native Americans in the U.S. prisons—as compared with other races—so you might just have to, politely, ask if you can sit at a table. I watched one Eastern Indian get shoved away from five tables before he found a group who would allow him to sit, and that was only after he asked permission. I get that this can be a huge hit to your pride, but you're gonna have to get used to minimizing your ego.

And stay away from the gangs, they are trouble in the long run. We'll get into that more later.

If you are white and realize black men or other ethnicities are beginning to sit at your table, or in the surrounding area, knock once on the table (that's right, knock), get up, and leave. Among all the race divisions, knocking is the established method for inmates to respectfully say good-bye without talking. If you are big and black and think you can handle the eighty-five pound white boy at the table, and you refuse to knock or respectfully acknowledge that you are leaving the table, guess again. You've just disrespected every other white person who is sitting at that table. The tribe will turn on you, no question.

Table manners are important, and different from what you're used to. If cutting in line is the first thing that results in violence in prison cafeterias, reaching across the table is probably second, as I discovered when reaching for the salt. You are not in a McDonalds or hospital cafeteria, where reaching, grabbing, or taking condiments from an occupied table are acceptable. Even when sitting with people within your race, if you see packets of sugar, salt, or pepper on the table prior to your arrival, respectfully ask, "Is it okay to take one of these?" Reaching across another inmate's tray is considered blatantly disrespectful. So is "man-spread," sitting in such a way that you are taking up more than your fair share of the space, making the guy next to you have to shuffle or huddle because you've got your elbows thrown out or your legs spread apart. Inmates will not wait until you leave the cafeteria to settle these matters. They are handled instantly. And because you will be assaulted swiftly, you will not stand a chance. No one will assist you for that type of disrespect.

The food is another concern. I gained weight in prison until I got ahold of myself and starting eating with discipline. It was hard to get used to the crap food. In one prison, we were served generic chocolate cupcakes for breakfast every day. There was nothing healthy about that diet. You will not be eating organic foods, or even much fresh food. You may come into prison with heart disease or diabetes, or even develop these diseases while on the inside; the American Diabetes Association estimates that at least 5 percent of the population needs to be on a managed diet in order to control their diabetes. While there are prison doctors or dieticians who will help you put together a nutrition plan, it's basically up to you whether or not you're going to follow that plan, and it can be tough when you are faced

with unhealthy food choices. If you're sick, you need to realize that the bulk of prison cafeteria food is highly processed and high in calories, so be prepared to eat a lot of salads.

While you're eating, you need to be on your guard at all times and pay attention to your instincts. If you feel the hair stirring on the back of your neck or it becomes eerily quiet, look around. If you notice a fight brewing, move away. These are no schoolhouse peacock displays where someone can tap out. No, fights in prison are serious business, and the cafeteria, like the exercise yard, is no stranger to beatings and stabbings. They generally happen fast, with little warning, so always keep your guard up. If you see the guys next to you start to gather around someone, or exchange meaningful glances, or start a hostile conversation, you grab your tray and leave. Don't hang out to see if something is going to happen. Remember, curiosity killed the cat—and so will being part of the crowd that urges on one side or the other in the fight. Memories are long in prison.

When should you fight? If someone is physically pushing you around, or even in your face threatening you, you have to consider your response carefully. I saw small guys or puny guys back down, but that just exposed their vulnerability; if you do that, the pack will eventually converge on you. It'll start with catcalls, stealing, and extortion, but it very likely will move to violence, including rape, over time. You will become the dog everyone likes to kick. So, if you think you are a weak fighter, seriously consider throwing down anyway, even though it probably means you end up bloody and bruised. But others will see you are willing to stick up for yourself, that you're not going to be an easy target.

Again, you are not to trust anyone in prison to have your back. Even your cell mate. When you walk into that cafeteria, you are not looking for friends, or even someone to protect you. You are on your own. Even the guys of your race sitting at your table aren't going to stick their neck out for you. It will take time to prove yourself in jail. Be pleasant, amiable, but keep up a wall.

Someone at the table will eventually ask what you're in for, to try to make the new guy talk. Go ahead and tell them (unless you're a pedophile —you best keep your mouth shut) if you feel like sharing. I discovered right away, it is very important you do not go on about being innocent, even if you are. These guys can take that to mean you think you are better than them, that they are just a bunch of criminals who deserve to be in prison

while you do not. And again, absolutely do not ask someone why they are in prison unless you have already, over time, established a respectful relationship and it seems that the other person is willing to talk about their past.

The guards in the cafeteria—or anywhere—are not your friends. If you rely on them to protect you, you look weak, and they won’t always be around. And, frankly, most of these guys don’t make much money; they’re not going to want to stick out their neck or even do the paperwork for an incident report because of you. Avoid talking to guards in a friendly way, or being seen inside their office, because other prisoners will assume you are snitching. Even a conversation about sports can be construed as snitching. And always do what a guard asks you to do without complaint. He asks you to pick up some garbage that’s not yours? Suck it up, do it. If a guard decides he doesn’t like you, he can come down hard about petty rule violations (such as leaving the cafeteria with a roll), or turn a blind eye to harassment.

Of course, the cafeteria may not be a concern if you’re in a high security prison. Depending on the facility, and where you’re located on the inside, you might be in your cell for twenty-three hours a day. That means you’ll be eating your meals in your box, served through a slot in the door. You won’t need to worry about pissing off someone in the lunch line, but you will want to consider keeping your mess to a minimum. You don’t want to hang out in a cell that smells like old food, or has become a hangout for roaches. Spreading food on the wall because you’re pissed off or bored may sound like a good idea in the moment, but when that meatloaf starts turning rancid, you’re going to rethink your decision real quick.

Low security prison issues are slightly different from minimum, since you have a bit more freedom of movement. You might be in a cell with four guys, or even an open-dorm room, with a shared common room where you can eat. As I’ve said, you’re going to have to clean up after yourself and respect the shared space, or someone is going to come down on you, either a guard or an inmate looking for a reason to fight. If you’ve purchased food from the commissary, make sure you keep it locked up in your locker. And absolutely do not take someone else’s food (or anything else), even if it looks like it’s been abandoned on a table. You’re going to need to be very patient waiting for the microwave. I learned the hard way, as usual.

One night, there was a crew of inmates cooking raw chicken in the microwave, the pieces having been cut small and smuggled from the kitchen inside a five-gallon plastic bucket. I asked the inmates several times if I could just quickly heat my oatmeal, since their project was taking forever. One of them repeatedly replied, “hold on a minute,” which did nothing more than piss me off after a while. Finally, I stopped controlling my rage and pulled the bucket (covered in a see-through plastic garbage bag) out of the microwave. We nearly came to blows, and just that quick I was surrounded by ten guys. My temper had gotten the best of me in a situation in which I was clearly outmatched. Thankfully, my friend Jose stepped in to squash the uproar, or this story would have a much different ending.

Prison is full of hard times like this. For both male and female inmates, it’s easy to succumb to depression, so try to take control where you can. You’ll have no choice but to spend a lot of time sitting or standing in one place, and your options for exercise are limited. Unfortunately, prison food is high in calories and carbohydrates, since the government buys cheap, processed food in bulk. Federal prisons will purchase fresh fruit and vegetables, but the food is standard, without seasonings. The food can really suck. Choose the salad bar when you can. Iceburg lettuce and carrots might be bland, but at least they won’t kill you. Female prisoners I’ve worked with generally tend to have their sense of self-worth attached to their weight more than men, so, if this is something you’re worried about, you’ll need to be conscious of every food choice you make.

That’s especially true in county jails, where you don’t generally have cafeterias. Instead, you are kept in the cell and all food is delivered to the doors. Trays are slid through the bars. Here, breakfast is generally served between six and seven in the morning. While I was in Freehold county jail in Monmouth County, New Jersey, trusted inmates with short sentences would yell out “cups on the bars,” to which inmates would hop out of their dorm bunks and place their plastic coffee cups on the bars. Two minutes later, the worst coffee you can imagine would be poured into your ten-ounce cup.

Though it’s hard to think about, pregnant inmates will need to be particularly careful with nutrition. Four percent of the female population is pregnant, according to the Bureau of Justice. That means, out of 113,000 female prisoners, roughly 4,500 are carrying a child and will have special

dietary needs. Make sure your intake paperwork clearly reflects your need for alternative foods, since not only do you need to make sure you're going to receive checkups and have access to prenatal vitamins, there are certain foods you should avoid (such as tuna) which are served regularly in prison. You must advocate for yourself when it comes to food choices and caring for your baby.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE SHOWER AND LAUNDRY

7 A.M.

**T**HERE ARE SIX showerheads available in the small, white-and-mold tiled room, but no guards. Terror is probably turning your bowels to water as you try to decide if you really need to shower. You've seen the movies. But you've probably also had the nervous sweats and so you'll literally smell scared. Keeping the towel wrapped around you until the last possible second, you're going to turn on the water and probably decide against waiting for it to get hot. Bust out your tiny green bottle of Pert shampoo, rinse under the tepid stream, and get dressed without taking the time to dry off. Try not to look freaked out, though the amused faces and hoots from the room full of naked men will let you know if you were unsuccessful.

Keeping clean in prison is a necessity, not a luxury. As I said before, you need to wear clean clothes and take showers not just because that's what you're used to on the outside, or because it's an administrative policy, but also to make sure you aren't offending anyone with your body odor. You've got a cell mate and he is going to care if you stink.

I saw new guys avoid the showers because of fear, but that never played out well. During my first year inside, two different men were harassed into leaving the television room because they smelled so offensive. One of them had his head dunked in a used toilet to encourage him to get under the

shower spray. If an inmate starts to stink, other inmates have the right to ask the guy to leave the shared spaces, or move into another cell. If he still refuses to take a shower, his fellow inmates may give him a time frame to check into Administrative Segregation (Ad Seg) or suffer the consequences later. If he's smart, he will take his shower, but if he absolutely refuses, the correctional officers can write a disciplinary sanction or throw him in Ad Seg. And he better hope that happens before the prisoners enforce their threats.

Put simply: Don't stink. Take a shower.

Hollywood makes it look like you're going to get raped every time you take a shower—don't panic, that's just not true. Don't get me wrong, rape is sometimes used as a tool to punish or subdue fellow inmates, even in the women's facilities, but it's rare. And if a man is trying to find himself a sex partner, voluntarily or not, there will be signs to watch for. More than once, I overheard convicts chatting up fresh meat and offering advice or gifts, but really they were trying to trick the new guy into letting his guard down around them in the shower. For example, I know an inmate who left some Honey Buns and magazines on the bunk of a new guy two cells down from me. The guy accepted the gifts, not realizing the convict was going to follow him into the shower later and make him "pay" for the stuff.

Rape is preventable if you can avoid making enemies, you're not gullible, and you pay attention. But if you are raped, you should not wash or shower.

Go to medical ASAP, get tested for sexual diseases, and hopefully you'll get the necessary medication to combat any possible diseases. You have the right to find out the investigation details in most cases, thanks to the Prison Rape Elimination Act, which was put into place some years ago to curb the prison rape culture, creating a supposed zero-tolerance policy for intimate contact (which includes a friendly slap on the ass during a basketball game).

In most prisons, if you are not on lockdown, you can usually go to the shower room in your cell block, or housing unit, at different times throughout the day. Try to pick a time when the room is not jammed, but neither do you want to be there if it's empty. The shower rooms are supposed to be cleaned, but I was in a few prisons where "clean" was loosely interpreted by the prison workers—very loosely interpreted. Some institutions are clean, especially the newer ones, but many shower floors

and walls are layered in semen, urine, feces, and fungus. If you're not given a pair of shower shoes when you are brought in, get a pair of shower shoes or flip-flops from the commissary right away. Your other alternative is to use the cheap, low-cut, orange or blue sneakers they issue inmates when you are first processed into the institution. When the shower drains or bathroom pipes back up, as they are wont to do, do not walk through that sludge. Clean your feet thoroughly if it happens, using some kind of disinfectant if you can, especially on open cuts or bug bites. If you land in a county jail, state, or federal prison with a shower that's cleaned daily, consider it a blessing. Inmates are assigned to clean showers but finding one who puts his heart and soul into the job is as likely as seeing a lion and hyena raising one another's cubs.

Convicts customarily offer shower shoes to new prisoners—this is the only gift from an inmate you should consider taking. There is a general consensus that no one wants to begin his incarceration by picking up a nasty foot infection. Oh, and one more side note on shower shoes: walk carefully. Those cheap, plastic bastards are slippery when wet. I thought I broke my tailbone the one time I wasn't paying attention and moved across a wet tile floor too fast. If you're gonna' get hurt in prison, you want the story to contain the words, "you should see the other guy," not "I slid in my flip-flops."

Once you've got the appropriate footwear, walk into the shower with your towel, leaving on your boxers or briefs, and quickly do your soaping and rinsing, wrap the towel back around you, and get out. The shower is not a place to dawdle. But don't look scared. Dogs smell fear.

As you're going about your hygiene, don't make eye contact; don't stare. I've said it before, and I'll say it again. But especially when you're standing naked next to some other dude ... keep your eyes on the wall. Looking at someone is an invitation to violence. And you absolutely do not want to give the impression you are seeking sexual attention. Unless you are. But even so, you have to know that these guys aren't looking for a romantic interlude. There is a population of institutionalized heterosexual males who engage in homosexual activity on the inside because they want the release, but they'll fight anyone who calls them gay, and they definitely are not looking for a boyfriend. Those encounters are almost always done in secret. No inmate likes being called gay when they are not. Being openly gay in prison can get you killed by guys looking to prove their toughness, or it can

make you a target for some guy who doesn't consider himself gay but gets off on rape. As I said, rape is not an everyday thing, but it does happen—4 percent of inmates in 2012 reported being raped (US Department of Justice), and that's just the victims who came forward.

So, don't strike up a conversation with anyone while taking a shower—that is a signal for wanting sex. Offer only polite, short responses if someone starts talking to you.

If you are attacked while in the shower, make yourself as small a target as possible. Fight back if you can. Best to trust your instincts and get the hell out of there if someone's body language is dangerous or the hairs on the back of your neck are rising. Paying attention to my instincts saved my ass many times, literally.

Once you're done with your shower, you're going to need to take care of your clothes. Since you are only allotted a certain amount of clothes, you need to be responsible enough to get them washed at least once a week, or more if you are exercising in them. The laundry system varies from prison to prison, but you generally will have a laundry room, similar to a laundromat on the outside, where you can wash and dry your clothes, though you'll need to buy the soap from the commissary. If you find that someone else's load has finished drying and you need the dryer, you may remove the clothes, as long as you politely fold them and leave them in a neat stack. If you're not willing to do that, you need to wait for another dryer to free up. You can't just dump someone else's clothes in a heap, it's considered disrespectful. Imagine how pissed that makes the woman in your life, when you dump a load of her clothes on the bed—multiply that rage by ten in prison.

You can wash your own sheets or towels, but you usually just exchange them once a week for clean ones at the laundry room. In between using the laundry room, you can wash some of your clothes in your cell and hang them to dry, as was mentioned earlier. But you are probably not going to want to be constantly surrounded by hanging underwear.

If you choose to leave while your clothes are still in the washer or dryer, you are taking a risk. Swiping someone's gym socks or a T-shirt is a common occurrence in lower security prisons. Many convicts pay someone to sit in the room and do their laundry. Of course, that can lead to funny situations. One time, my friend and I were walking through the prison housing unit and heard an openly gay guy in the laundry room saying "I just

love your dirty drawers, I just love your dirty drawers.” We thought he was actually talking with someone, but when we passed by laundry room, he was holding a pair of men’s underwear in both hands, talking to them. He had a crush on some inmate and was holding a conversation with the guy’s underwear. We thought that was hilarious.

I’ve already said this, but if you are a kleptomaniac, you better break that habit before you are incarcerated with a bunch of men who have few possessions and the very real desire to kill anyone who would dare steal from them. A pair of socks may seem like nothing to you now, but jail has a way of reacquainting you with the value of the little things you took for granted on the outside.

One of the worst beat downs I’ve seen was because of stealing. When I was at Fort Dix, with three thousand inmates divided into a west side and an east side, a new guy was transferred over from the other side and placed in a room with a bunch of cellies I knew. He told me he’d been moved because he was accused of stealing but that he hadn’t done it. I believed him. I even thought he was a good guy, but still kept my eye on him. One day, I noticed he wasn’t around and one of his cell mates, who I knew to be a stand up guy, finally told me, “We had to punish the guy.” They’d beaten him badly, with cans of tuna fish in tube socks. According to the boys, those who lived in that room were in the habit of leaving their lockers open, having come to trust one another. But when the new guy moved in, suddenly small items like candy bars and even socks went missing. They showed him no mercy. That man was relocated to a different prison because his life was in danger, though he never did snitch on the guys who beat him. I remained friends with the roommates, but I felt bad for the klepto. He seemed like a nice enough guy; he just couldn’t control his impulses. He sure paid for it.

The one place you won’t have to worry about anyone stealing your socks is in The Hole, but you also have no access to laundered clothes. I wish I didn’t know this from personal experience, but as I said, I got into fights or put under investigation for one reason or another early on and ended up in Ad Seg more than once. So, what did I do to clean my clothes? I used the toilet. Once you’ve flushed, there is clean water in the bowl, no matter how disgusting it might seem. First, I would take my shirt and place it in the tiny, flat sink, get the material damp without getting too much water on the floor, and then I would scrub the material with a bar of soap. Then, I would do what the old-timers taught me: dunk the shirt in the toilet, flushing

multiple times to provide a rush of fresh, running water. I'd squeeze it out really good and hang it up.

You may have the same issue at a high security facility. Depending on which institution and where you're located on the inside, you might be in your cell for twenty-three hours a day. You will be on a strict showering schedule, with limited or no access to laundering, so consider that if you're going to spend two hours working out and sweating like a beast in your cell.

On the other end of the spectrum, low security facility showers and laundries are most likely to be large, open rooms—think high school locker rooms. There will be more people coming in and out, and still no guards, so all the more reason to do your business and move along. If you sense tension rising or a fight brewing, get out. You do not want to become involved, either physically or as a witness.

Women tend to take longer in the shower. But the rules are the same as for the men: don't dawdle. If you want to shave your legs, you may be able to buy a razor at the commissary, but in some prisons you might only be able to check one out, to use within ten minutes or less. There is less physical violence among the women, but it still exists. Do whatever primping you're going to do back in your cell. I've been in The Hole and you're given only seven minutes to shower and shave before the water automatically shuts off, whether you still have soap on your body or not; it's the same in some of the female prisons. You won't be allowed makeup, but a lot of women (and some men) use Kool-Aid to stain their lips and cheeks, which you can get that at the commissary. Some women have also used Sharpies and colored pencils as eyeliner, but be aware it can make your eyes red or dried out. There are other foods (especially candy) or items (newspapers) that use dye or can work as a stain (coffee, juice), so there is a lot of experimenting with using lotion to transfer the color onto the face. My personal opinion is to stay away from putting chemicals on your skin that aren't meant to be there, but I understand a woman often times has a lot of her self-confidence tied up in her appearance. I sympathize, but suggest you use common sense when it comes to vanity in prison.

I know women who stick magazine tear-out samples of perfume in with their clothes, either in the dryer or in the folded clothes, to serve in the place of a nice-smelling dryer sheet. Why not? A little aromatherapy can be soothing.

When you first go in, male or female, you will be given a small amount of toiletries that will quickly run out. I remember that first day, being handed my fish kit, also called a bedroll, which was one blanket, two sheets, four pairs of underwear, two T-shirts, pants, socks, a pair of shoes, one winter coat, two rolls of toilet paper, one single-blade Bic razor, and one cheap bar of soap. As I emptied my meager possessions onto my bunk, I realized this was it—all that I had to my name. Make sure your family has placed money into your commissary account as soon as they can. In the meantime, the women tend to offer shampoo and shower shoes to the new inmates much more often than the men. Again, be wary of gifts, but it does seem that women differ from men in that they usually provide these few items without expecting anything but respect in return.

# CHAPTER 4

## WORK

8 A.M.

**Y**OU'VE FINISHED EATING breakfast, even taken a shower, and lived to tell the tale. Now you're going to sit on your bunk, trying to be invisible while you wait for someone to tell you what to do next.

The Ten-Minute Move bell is going to ring, giving you precious little time to leave your section of the prison and get to your workstation at the library, where you'll make a whopping thirteen cents an hour. At least you're out of your cell, doing *something*. You'll need to hustle, since you have to make it to the other side of the large compound before the bell rings again. You'll suffer if you're not there for the head count at the end of the Ten-Minute Move, maybe even placed in lockdown.

Federal prisoners are required to work for a minimum of seven hours a day, generally for \$0.12 to \$0.40 an hour, unless you are sick or mentally unfit. The point is to help keep the inmates from going stir-crazy, but also to maintain the day-to-day operation of the institution. Sometimes these jobs can even provide a small amount comfort or sense of normalcy.

One of my luckiest assignments was in my early days of incarceration: I was assigned to food service as a clerk. I was responsible for organizing the paperwork for the food service supervisor. It was a sweet job that allowed me to leave the cafeteria and work out in the gym while housing units were

being called to eat. I wasn't confined to the back of the hot kitchen, where other inmates were assigned to cook, sweep, mop, scrub pots and pans, and take out the garbage. I was making grade-one pay, roughly \$120.00 per month. I was thrilled with this assignment, but had to be careful not to screw up because there was a long list of prisoners ready to take my place.

Regardless of where you are assigned, you'll need to follow both the administrative rules and the unspoken inmate rules in order to avoid problems during work hours.

Upon entry, you'll be assigned to wherever the prison has a need for another "employee," usually something like food service, laundry, bathrooms, or a groundskeeper picking up litter outside. Be sure to ask around to see what types of assignments are available (or might come available), or if there is a job you might like, and get yourself on a waiting list—especially one where you might have some talent or skill associated with the task. Establishing a track record for good behavior and a work ethic will help you in your attempts to switch jobs, but there are never any guarantees you will get what you want. That's true of most things in prison.

You do have to work. That's a given. However, you can (and should) look at it as an opportunity to learn a skill or trade useful on the outside, such as landscaping, maintenance, painting, or plumbing. These are tough jobs to get, but worth the effort to try. You might as well use your time wisely and take advantage of any free education or training that comes your way. What else are you going to do? Wait out the hours, feeling sorry for yourself? It didn't work for me.

If you are educated, or you are particularly good in a business or vocational area, you can get a job teaching classes in the education department at the prison. It's important to keep your brain active, especially if you are used to working at a high mental capacity. It's also true that jailhouse teachers and lawyers tend to get more respect, especially if they are helping out fellow inmates, and doing it without condescension. Absolutely never make anyone feel stupid. You'll be working with a lot of guys who did not get past tenth grade, so they are going to be super sensitive to any criticism from you, or even highbrow language you might be throwing around.

Do not make your supervisor mad. Be on time, don't screw around, don't steal, and don't irritate others. Your supervisor has to evaluate you at least

once a month, and what he says influences your pay, and he can get you moved to a less desirable job in the institution. On the other hand, if your supervisor likes you, he can put in a good word for you at another job site you might want.

Learning how to work in a kitchen is definitely a skill you can use on the outside, maybe even to find a job. But if you get assigned to kitchen duty, just know that means a very early morning for you. Officers wake inmates working the kitchens at approximately 3:30 a.m., and give them fifteen to twenty minutes to wash their faces and brush their teeth. Around 3:50, inmates are escorted to the kitchen, where they have a head count. After all the inmates are accounted for, they begin their assigned task, like cooking, cutting vegetables, etc., so that breakfast can be served when the housing units are released at 6:00 a.m.

There are reasons to want to work in the kitchen, though. Some of the most coveted jobs are the ones where the inmates can benefit from a side hustle. For instance, guys who work in the kitchen will often try to sneak out desserts, chicken, fish, egg sandwiches, or fresh vegetables to sell to their cell mates or neighbors—which is simply good politics, keeping inmates in your vicinity happy. You just need to make sure you are not caught by your supervisor doing anything illegal or wrong or you might end up with a change in job assignments, lose visits, lose any Good Conduct Behavior time, get put in The Hole, or get shipped to another prison.

Dessert Dan had the ultimate hustle out of the kitchen, but he did have to be careful not to get caught. He worked in the cafeteria and the food service staff loved him. He could make any dessert taste like it came from a world-class restaurant, and he was famous for his banana pudding. He'd smuggle two dozen bananas out of food service with creamer, and sugar, and get boxes of vanilla wafers from the commissary. He'd have guys hold the microwave for him while he mashed up bananas, creamer, and sugar, which he'd then bring to a boil. In another bowl, he'd layer the vanilla wafers and sliced banana, then pour in the microwaved mixture. His homeboys would bring buckets of ice to chill the pudding. Dessert Dan would charge \$7 per bowl and take at least five orders per day. The \$35 per day, multiplied by the thirty days in a month, equaled an average of \$1,050 per month.

He was prison rich. He'd send stamps home and have his family somehow convert them to cash. One day, he showed me his inmate account slip, revealing over \$27,000. He'd take orders days ahead of time and more

often than not, he took the money up front. When he was running low on deodorant, toiletries, or other items, he would make out a list and have inmates purchase those goods from commissary in exchange for the banana pudding. He never spent cash for anything except putting money on his phone account.

Dessert Dan worked hard for his money. He was an excellent salesman; everyone recognized his voice as he walked throughout the prison yard or inside the dorm on a Monday or Tuesday, yelling out, "I'm taking orders for Friday! Banana Pudding! Only two bowls left for Friday, and don't ask tomorrow, 'cuz I'm selling out!" The inmates liked him. He was always in a good mood, maybe explained by the cloud of weed that followed him. Every once in a while I'd tease him, saying, "You smell like that Cheech and Chong banana pudding." He'd wink as he wandered past, hawking his pudding, and say, "Doc, all work and no play makes Dan a dull boy." He was one guy who figured out how to make the system work for him while providing a service that made everyone happy.

Orderlies within the prison system are assigned to clean the bathrooms, hallways, and other areas of the housing unit. They wax and buff floors, pick up trash, mop up blood from prison fights, and clean up urine and feces within the housing unit. They also have access to cleaning supplies, which inmates will often use for a side hustle. Within each housing unit, there is a market for inmates who want their cells to smell clean. Orderlies will sweep and mop other guys' cells inside the housing unit in exchange for stamps, cans of tuna fish, mackerel, cigarettes, etc. Essentially, these convicts build a clientele base, just like a landscaper on the outside. They can clean several cells during the course of the week.

The barbershop is likely one of the best hustles in prison. Inmates want to look their best when a visit is expected, but prisons offer inmates only one free haircut per month. Some inmates, who receive visits frequently, prefer to stay trimmed up. I, for one, did not want to look unkempt when someone had taken the time to come see me. Haircuts usually cost me \$5 to \$10. The average barber will cut eight to fifteen heads per day. That can amount to \$50, or even more than \$100, per day. The payment is predetermined, usually in the form of stamps, canned food, Honey Buns, or other commissary items, since no one has cash in the joint.

The library is another place that's highly coveted while offering hustling opportunities. Most prisons have libraries that look and feel like a town

library, with shelves of offerings that you can check out. I knew a guy who grew up obsessed with reading books and said being in the library was a comfort, offering a small taste of home. And as a librarian, you'll be at the top of the pecking order when new books, magazines, and newspapers arrive. You'll be the source of highly sought after new entertainment, since families and friends aren't allowed to send books or magazines—drugs, illicit photos, and other contraband can be concealed inside these materials. Inmates *can* have books or magazines mailed directly to them from the publisher or universities, though asking publishers to mail directly to a jail can be a crapshoot. Even with a tax deduction, not all publishers are willing to help out convicted criminals. I'll never forget the kindness Dr. David Dorsey showed me when he and his students would send me boxes of books from Clark Atlanta University, primarily black history and sociology books, which I read and passed along to fellow inmates. If you're lucky enough to work in the library, you'll get first crack at the new books, and you've got a way to fill the downtime while you're at work, and it can be a great side hustle since plenty of inmates will barter stuff such as cigarettes and stamps in order to be the first to read a newspaper or do the crossword.

Single women in particular have the opportunity to learn a trade that may be impossible to get on the outside, since a large portion of female inmates come from a situation where they have low paying, blue-collar jobs (like waitressing, housecleaning, and day care), have little education, and have no time to take classes or train because they need to be at home with children. This is the time to push yourself and learn something that will benefit you on the outside. For instance, take a job where you have to learn how to use hand tools, or build furniture, or work on plumbing or electrical. Don't shy away from a job simply because you don't think you can do it—give it a try.

The best side hustle for women is dressing hair. Prisons will have the female version of a local beauty salon, and they may even offer a certification in cosmetology. Like the male prisons, female prisons offer one haircut a month, but these facilities rarely have the equipment you might be used to, like straightening irons or blow-dryers. But a smart, wily hair dresser can make good money on the side, especially if she can get a hold of things like home perm kits or boxed colors or if she's exceptionally good at braiding or styling hair. It is important to note, however, prisoners are not

allowed to drastically change the cut unless they report it and get a new photo id, and a new color is not allowed at all.

If you happen to be in a state or federal prison partnered with Unicor Industries, which takes advantage of prison labor, a more interesting array of jobs will be available to you. Some of these institutions have a waiting list that can take months. Their highly coveted jobs can net more than two hundred dollars per month. That is more than some make as head of household in Third-World countries. Bear in mind there are production quotas in Unicor and it's very difficult to fake it if you're not up to the task. If you have a crab-ass correctional officer, he can really lay on the pressure to produce if you are on an assembly line of sewing machines or whatever. Rarely will you see an inmate slacking in Unicor.

Sure, you're working for a pittance, but some prisons which have Unicor will have positions where you will be making clothes, textiles, office furniture, or assembling electrical cables. The American public doesn't necessarily love the fact that there's a huge, cheap labor pool vying for their jobs, but it benefits you when you're on the inside. Again, make sure you use this opportunity to learn something useful or network before you're released.

A lot of time on the job is spent trying to find something to do. If you're assigned to the painting department, and there's no painting to be done, you've got to come up with something. Some guys will go to other housing units to visit their friends under the guise of painting projects. There is a lot of boredom and downtime associated with these jobs, so don't let yourself get in trouble. Find something to do that will occupy your time and not piss off your supervisor.

Most of the guys I knew would try for the higher-paying assignments so they could help out their families, though it would never be a huge amount of money. The pay is deposited monthly into the inmate's account. Inmates can spend the funds in the commissary, order books from publishers, or send the money home. (The check looks exactly like a tax return check issued by the IRS. Then again, why wouldn't it? After all, it's coming from the federal government.) I do recommend you make sure you take care of your own needs. The small pleasures you can buy on the inside are good for your emotional health.

Prisoners in the high security facilities will not have the same work opportunities, since they are not allowed to move freely or mingle with the

other prisoners. If you find yourself in this situation, the job options are severely limited, so your best bet is to get on the waiting lists as soon as you can. For instance, the high security prisons sometimes have inmates designated to push a book cart up and down the wing they are housed in. Obviously, this is a coveted job, since you have the ability to stretch your legs and talk to people—but you also have an obvious side hustle, delivering messages (these messages are called kites) from one cell to another.

On the other end of the spectrum, inmates who are working at a low security prison, including prison camps, will have more freedom. Sometimes, inmates will be allowed to leave the premises and return at the end of the day. If you are lucky enough to earn this privilege, keep your nose clean and be grateful for the freedom you have. It takes very little to get you sent up the river to minimum or even maximum security.

I know a guy who worked with a community work crew maintaining parks and public places in the city. He said the work was decent and he enjoyed getting off the prison grounds. He made fifty cents an hour, working five days a week, eight hours a day. Unless an inmate has mandatory restitution fines, the money is deposited into their account. This guy got to be outside, raking leaves, clearing street drains, and cleaning up litter. He talked about crews that actually got to work in and around local hospitals. They flirted with the cute nurses and once in a while they got their girlfriends to pop up at the hospital and sneak into the men's room for a quickie. Something like a road crew detail may not be exciting, but it sure beats the hell out of peeling potatoes in a windowless room all day. Believe me, I know.

You will not become rich working your prison job, but you can walk out with a resume listing new skills or trade experience you wouldn't have had otherwise. I'm certainly not saying a convict will have an easy time finding a job once you're back on the street—because you won't—but you can at least make it easier for those willing to give a felon a chance.

# CHAPTER 5

## EXERCISE

2 P.M.

YOUR WORK DETAIL is over, lunch is done, and suddenly you're faced with decisions. Some of the guys have to go back to work, but maybe you've got a shorter shift, leaving you with free time. Cellie probably throws on his shorts and heads out to the exercise yard, but are you ready for that?

I'd been weight lifting since I was in eighth grade, so I felt physically capable of taking care of myself when I walked into the yard my first day, but I was not *emotionally* ready to keep myself calm and patient. I had so much anger, it was boiling off of me. Exercise was a good idea to burn away some of that rage, but I didn't yet have a handle on sharing space with hundreds of aggro dudes, not when I wasn't good at managing my own aggression. I was lucky I didn't get shivved. I saw it happen, though, and I was in plenty of extreme fights.

Don't let me scare you away from exercising. As dangerous as the yard can be, I do believe exercise can save your life. You just have to be smart.

No one is going to take care of your physical health. Only you. The only way to manage stress and weight and overall health is to make yourself get up and move.

This is particularly true in the county jails, where you will be constricted to individual pods or cells, whereas prisons give you an opportunity to walk the prison yard (also called the recreation yard) for a few hours between announced hourly controlled movements.

You have to get some exercise, that's all there is to it. It can help reduce the risk of health conditions ranging from heart disease to type 2 diabetes, cancer, stroke, dementia, and depression. As I said, be smart; watch where each gang congregates—study the movements of people who are consistently together. Discreetly listen to conversations, then assess the type of people you are around. I would walk the yard with a towel over my head, with ear phones covering my ears, but my radio turned off. I'd walk the track or be in the weight room listening to every discussion I could, surreptitiously. The chit-chat ranged from hilarious things happening in the daily lives of inmates to planning vendettas for late payments or straight-up extortion. Exercise was always my main goal, but prison gossip was my version of CNN.

The weight room remains the primary outlet for inmates who want to get the aggression out of their system. Initially, you may find it difficult to establish a workout routine because there are a limited supply of weights. Do not become visibly frustrated if there aren't any left. Inmates have established workout routines with the same weightlifting partners for years, and their gym schedules are planned ahead of time. The dumbbells and steel plates are shared among the gym regulars, who've been there at the same time for months or years, and they trade favors to make sure their time in the gym is unimpeded. You'll just have to wait it out.

In Ashland, Kentucky, they had a relatively small indoor weight room adjacent to an outdoor weight room. One daily lifter was a huge white guy nicknamed Sub Zero, called that because he would lift weights in a pair of shorts regardless of the temperature, and he preferred being outside. He'd push the snow off the weight bench with his feet, so he could lay down on the frozen bench and do bench presses. He'd also push the snow around at the squat rack in order to create a level footing for his squat routine. There were days when it was twenty degrees and he'd have his shorts on, lifting in the snow. The rest of the inmates would laugh and marvel at him—but through the window. None of us wanted to leave the gym. Some guys thought he was doing that to show off, but those of us who knew him were aware he wore those same shorts to the weight room all year. He could care

less what we thought of him; he just wanted to lift the way he wanted to lift. He was a character, a buff dude who came off as a badass but was totally a teddy bear at heart. He just took his workouts seriously. The only time I saw him get aggro was when someone tried to snag his weights before he was done.

If you decide to get in shape and start lifting weights, ask permission to take weights if they are not sitting on the rack. The worst time to be disrespectful is in the gym where testosterone is at its peak. Losing your cool will get you tossed around like a rag doll or hit in the head with a steel plate. Over time, inmates will adjust to seeing you in the gym. They will see your level of respect and determine how serious you are about staying in shape. Only then will they go out of their way to ask, “Would you like these weights when we’re finished?” You should cherish those words.

You do need to build, or keep, physical strength to defend yourself. But that doesn’t mean jumping into every fight. Sometimes, if you can swallow your pride, the real strength is in letting the little things slide. It doesn’t always feel little, I know.

At one point, when I was in FCI Fort Dix, there was an officer named Yeoman who thrived on profiling, harassing, and provoking inmates on a daily basis. He was the only officer I strongly considered stabbing. He was the personification of a racist correction officer, routinely targeting minorities. He would smile and pretend to be respectful, then see you hours later and act like you tied his mother up and tortured her. I hated him more than the worst inmate in prison. After meditating on the matter, I realized if I seriously hurt him I’d end up getting sent back to a maximum security prison, but not before getting an old-fashion beat down by officers at each institution I passed through before landing at my final destination. Every time I saw him, I wished he’d drop dead, but I’d stay cool. As we approached each other, I’d nod my head politely. He’d stop and say something like, “Turn around for a pat down.” Or he would pop in my room unexpectedly and rummage through my locker, leaving it in disarray. He’d intentionally crush crackers and pour out cereal. I tried dealing with him through humor or strong words. It was times like these I missed the respect shown to inmates at medium and high prisons. Eventually, I became motivated and began combining weights and calisthenics. I increased my strength and speed by lifting weights and playing basketball—I decided to become as physically fit as possible.

Luckily, I had a group I hung with at that time, so he kept his distance when we were in shared spaces. The exercise yard is similar to the cafeteria, in the sense that you will need to respect the pecking order established long before you arrived. If you want to use a basketball or join a game, you'll need to ask and walk away graciously if you are refused. Again, there will be some blows to your ego, but you have got to get a handle on that.

The yard is also like the cafeteria in that races generally stick together. But in many ways it can be worse because the convicts can build up adrenaline over a basketball game or whatever, and then you've got amped up guys in a small space. The prison yard is also where contraband such as cell phones, drugs, porn-mags, tobacco, rolling paper, etc. are exchanged. You might be shocked to learn many of these illegal items are brought in by correctional officers, or by cunning family members, or by remote devices such as drones. Violence on the prison yard can be crazy if the receiving inmate isn't in the proximity of his expected package. When a drone drops a package onto the prison yard and there is miscommunication, inmates will scramble to the package and fight to claim the contraband. You stay away.

You will occasionally see fights break out in the yard when officers who chew tobacco spit on the ground and inmates are trying to be the first to reach the spit, wipe it up with a tissue, and then dry the tobacco-laced saliva and hope for the remnants of tobacco leaves. CO's will also spit out used chew in the garbage can and, which is goldmine that inmates are willing to fight for. They will run to the can, grab the wad of used chew, dry it out, and then smoke or sell the leaves for ten to twenty dollars per cigarette. One regular cigarette is between thirty to fifty dollars. And if you think that's disgusting, wait until you see an inmate approach a newly processed crystal-meth user who still has the drug in his system, and pay the guy for one of his scabs. That's right, the meth is in the dried blood, so some prisoners desperate for a hit, no matter how small, will pay to eat a scab. Or chop it up and sniff it.

The yard is where you might be the most tempted to seek protection. Gangs know this and prey on the fresh meat, but most inmates do not need to join a gang for protection. Most inmates' crimes involve some type of infraction unrelated to gangs, such as fraud, drug dealing, murder, credit card schemes, mortgage scams, kidnapping, child molestation, or Ponzi schemes. If you find yourself in a high security prison, you especially want to avoid joining a gang. The majority of prison violence emanates from

gang retaliation against their rivals. You don't want to get caught in the middle of such conflicts. And even though most gangs are divided along racial lines, being loyal to your race does not mean you have to join a gang.

The primary gangs who reign in prison are the Bloods, Crips, the Aryan Brotherhood, MS 13, La Familia Nuestra, the Black Guerilla Family, Texas Syndicate, and the Mexican Mafia. There are more, and none of them are to be taken lightly.

Some gangs have a "blood in/blood out" rule, which means they must kill someone to get in and die to get out. If you join a gang, there is a good chance you will not be released from prison on time because you'll be involved in illegal activities that often include violence against other inmates. Your gang becomes your family, and that family comes first.

A gang may protect you from others, yet failure to follow their orders will result in punishment. For instance, if a fellow gang member is attacked, you are expected to retaliate on his behalf, meaning you will likely get hurt or killed. I knew a young inmate seeking protection who wanted to join the Aryan nation; he was assigned to take out my friend Mike as part of his initiation. Mike found himself locked into a mop closet with this guy and ended up having to kill him. That man's parents showed up at every one of Mike's meetings with the parole board for over ten years. Mike was finally released, but the guy seeking protection from the Aryan nation ended up dead. No one wins when gangs are involved.

Keep in mind, once you join, you will likely be in that gang for the rest of your life. In most instances, when gang members leave prison they are given only a few days to contact a higher ranking member. If you don't, you and your family may be severely beaten or killed. If you are in a gang that does not practice the blood in/blood out rule, get out before you leave prison so your family will not have to suffer the consequences.

I found that prison gangs use their time in the exercise yard wisely. They take pride in being physically prepared for extreme violence, unlike the fake gangbangers I've seen on the street, who don't work out, wear saggy pants, impregnate women, smoke weed, sell crack to buy a pair of sneakers, and play violent video games all day. Those distractions do not exist in prison. Furthermore, prison gangs don't play at being tough. They *are* the toughest—and most dangerous—people you'll ever meet.

If you've been convicted of a crime in any way related to a sex offense, you have limited choices if you want to survive your time. The best piece of

advice I have for you is to keep to yourself, keep your eyes down, and keep your body in fighting shape.

Convicts are looking for someone to kick around, someone lower than them on the totem pole, and that's you. Your attorney will tell you, your life is in danger if the other inmates discover why you are on the inside. Whether or not you are guilty has no bearing on your fellow inmates' disposition. And claiming to be innocent, whether you are or not, will only harden their hatred, because now they also see you as a whiny bitch. If you are a child molester, be prepared to stand up for yourself or die.

Unfortunately for you, it's hard to lie about your conviction, since inmates watch the news. They're in the loop. Most cases regarding a person convicted of child molestation, child pornography, rape, or other violent sexual assaults are televised on local and national networks. If you are a public figure like Dennis Hastert or a sports coach like Jerry Sandusky, there is no doubt inmates know your scheduled date of arrival and will be licking their chops to tear you limb from limb. I recall watching the news one night, seeing an exposé on a pedophile who'd been convicted and was on his way to prison. Immediately, inmates who were from his locale spread the word: keep an eye out for this guy.

Some prison administrations will give a pedophile the option of checking into administrative segregation rather than join the general population, which means you're in a locked cell twenty-three hours a day. You are certainly taking a chance if you choose general population. You might think because you didn't make the nightly news that no one knows your background. You're wrong. It's a coin toss whether the information has been leaked. This is definitely the type of gossip that spreads among the inmates like wildfire.

And it's not just inmates you have to watch out for. Correctional officers do not protect pedophiles or most sex offenders. You are going to be in their blind spot. Once in a while, an officer will even drop a dime on a molester, doing things like leaving out a newspaper, left open to an article about an offender in the prison.

Child molesters usually don't belong to gangs. Unlike many of the other prisoners, they didn't work with other criminals on the street before they came to prison, unless it was a joint effort with another colleague, usually through a website. But even if a pedophile did have gang affiliation on the outside, there's no way a gang would bring him into the fold once they

know he's a pedophile. More likely, a gang would happily rape you until you die. Stay away from them. Gang members are often victims of child abuse themselves, as are a high portion of those on the inside, and are looking for a little payback.

Child molesters generally come from a white-bread, suburban background, which also sets them apart from many of the other prisoners, who have street smarts and a network of convict connections from their neighborhoods. Because of a pedophile's low status behind bars, he doesn't have a chance in hell of developing connections on the inside. Frankly, it is in his best interest to stay far away from other sex offenders; trying to hang with them is a reminder to the populace that you are a "Chester," widening the target on your back.

I was in FCI Fairton when it was discovered a certain inmate was a pedophile. Once it was confirmed, several inmates ran into his cell and, from half a cell block away, I could literally hear his bones breaking while being hammered by cans of tuna inside socks. When I looked across the second-level tier toward the cell where the inmate was being brutally beaten, he managed to crawl halfway out before being snatched and dragged back into his cell. Blood was everywhere. His cries for help were muffled gargles; I imagine because his throat and mouth filled with blood. When the inmates left his cell, he remained on the floor, unconscious.

While I said sex offenders have a better chance if they stay in fighting shape and are prepared to stick up for themselves, sometimes the crime is just too heinous. Fifteen or more determined, rage-filled inmates can mutilate even a skilled fighter. When convicted child killer Daryell Dickson Meneses Xavier, a Gracie Barra competitor and jujitsu instructor, was incarcerated after reportedly beating, raping, and killing his nineteen-month-old stepson, his skill in the martial arts did not protect him. Daryell was raped by over twenty inmates, suffering massive injury to every square inch of his body, including the anus. However, the inmates were not satisfied with the beating, so they stalked and trapped him a few days later, tore his stitches out from the original beating, then proceeded to beat and rape him again and again.

It's hard to feel sorry for someone who could do that to a child. If you allow that dark side of your nature to rule your actions, be prepared for the consequences.

Okay, enough with the pedophiles. This brings me back to everyone else in prison and maintaining your own physical strength so you can defend yourself. If you don't feel safe in the exercise yard or weight room, you do have options. No matter what, you need to find a way to work off aggression, anxiety, and carbs. One of the jails I was in had recreation time only four times a week. We were let out into an area located in the center of the county jail building. I could see the sky, but we were surrounded by walls on all sides, with no chance of seeing even a tree. There was one basketball hoop bolted to a wall. In order to stay in shape, I had to find ways to work out in my cell, going old school with jumping jacks and running in place, doing things like sit-ups, push-ups, crunches, dips, wall sits, pull-ups, etc. Be creative. One ex-con, Coss Marte, was featured in *Men's Health Magazine* when his fifteen-minute body-weight prison workout went big on the outside, a five-move routine he developed at the Greene Correctional Facility while stuck in his cell. He certainly made the best out of hard time.

I used exercise to work on my mental and emotional well-being as much as my physical self, channeling out as much negativity as I could with good, old-fashioned sweat. Occasionally, an inmate would lead an exercise class, like Tai Chi or yoga, maybe aerobics in a female prison. These are good options and can also be done solo in your cell. Anything that gets you moving is good for your heart and your soul. You need to deal with that stress and anxiety; you can't let it simmer.

There is very little you can control in prison. The one thing you can control is how you maintain your body and mind.

I hope, for your sake, you are in a facility where you will get time outside, where you can appreciate the warmth of the sun on your cheek. The exercise yard might be stressful at times, but it's usually the only means you have to get Vitamin D, unless you have a job working on the grounds. Not exercising will increase your weight and your stress, but a lack of Vitamin D can affect your state of mind. There's a lot of evidence linking depression to low levels of Vitamin D, which is what the sun gives you. Get outside, if you can.

I would stand next to windows and stare outside whenever I got the chance, except when I was in the maximum security prison and stuck in my cell twenty-three hours a day. We had one hour to move around, and maybe once a week we were briefly allowed outside. It was tough. Exercise really

was necessary then to keep me sane. In the latter half of my sentence, it became apparent that depression was rampant, as was suicide (which led me to heading a suicide prevention group for my fellow inmates, which I will talk more about in chapter seven) and I found that exercise, any exercise, was imperative. My goal was to make it out alive and whole.

# CHAPTER 6

## Visitation / Phone Calls

3 P.M.

**Y**OU'LL WAIT IN line at the pay phones for twenty minutes. When it's your turn, you'll try calling your wife's cell but what if she doesn't answer? The line of convicts behind you, impatiently waiting for their one phone call, will definitely notice if you try to dial another number. You accept this fact quietly, and you do not to slam down the phone or draw attention to yourself. When the guy on the phone next to you starts screaming and beating the receiver against the wall, you just walk away.

I had a love-hate relationship with the prison phone. I'd be so excited to talk to someone and then I really hated it when I got the answering machine or voice mail. I saw plenty of grown men plummet into depression because their loved ones were not answering the phone. The worst, though, was when my friend Rydell ran out of minutes. The automated system would announce how many minutes he had left for the month, but he hadn't been paying attention and ran out. He ripped the phone handle and cord off the box, screaming like a madman. He was like a young, black Lou Ferrigno in his prime and all of us in line behind him could see his muscles flexing as he waved around the helpless receiver.

You only get three-hundred minutes per month. That's five hours. Five hours a month. My teenage daughter can wipe that out in a day. When you

reach three-hundred minutes, that's it, you're done talking to the outside—unless you're lucky enough to be incarcerated close to family or friends and someone is willing to travel to your prison on visitation day.

Let's get this out of the way, right off the bat: If you're in for three years, you're going without sex for three years. Well, you're not going to have conjugal visits, anyway. Those are a myth. The federal prison system does not allow for conjugal time, ever, and while four states still have the "extended visits," those are for the select few. Remember, this part is just as tough on your spouse as it is on you, so you two need to support each other, continue showing respect and love for each other, making it easier for the one on the outside to stay loyal.

Despite what you see on TV, hugging and kissing is often allowed on visitation day for most inmates (except in the county jails), but it is closely monitored. In order for someone to be allowed in, you must have submitted their name on a visitation list along with their address, and that person will need to have completed a questionnaire and passed a background check. Once your visitor arrives, he or she will be searched and scanned, as will their belongings and any gifts they will be allowed to bring in. You will get a single thirty-minute slot a week for visitors who will usually be allowed a short hug hello and a short hug good-bye. This type of visit is in an open, shared room with small tables. You can get away with limited hand holding if you haven't been causing problems, but that is if you're lucky enough to have a kind guard. And kind or not, you will get strip searched before you to return to your block, to make sure a loved one didn't slip the proverbial file into the cake.

I saw plenty of visits broken up early because either the inmate or the guest got loud or sexual with their conversations. You'll have to make sure your visitor knows what's appropriate and what isn't. That includes warning your loved one not to eavesdrop on the other prisoners' conversations and to turn a blind eye if other couples are up to something they shouldn't be—otherwise, there will be an immediate confrontation, or you will be getting your head stomped later. I recall sitting in the visiting room with my friend Lasharra when she tapped me and asked me to look. I glanced around the visiting room but didn't notice anything unusual. She tapped me again and nodded her head to indicated the table behind me. My friend Shaheed, who was serving a twenty-year sentence, was getting oral sex right there.

Miraculously, the guards were not paying attention. I was embarrassed for Lasharra, having to see that, but kept my mouth shut. They are simply the rules of the game. Respect.

Maybe for this reason, I've never seen a county jail allow contact during visits. Noncontact visitation is exactly like what you see in the courtroom dramas, where the visitor is seated on the other side of a glass partition talking to you on a telephone, usually for less than thirty minutes. Metal partitions separate the four to twenty inmates sitting on stools behind a half-inch wall of glass. There are no hugs or kisses, unless they are acted out like a game of charades. I remember seeing women lift their skirts, remove their panties, even their bras, for their loved ones on the other side of the glass. These daring women were providing a three-second peep show. The saddest thing was when the women would hold their infants in such a way as to block the view of officers while they exposed themselves.

It's tough on you when visitations are canceled, but it does happen. Unforeseen things come up, such as car trouble, sicknesses, work, or transportation funds. I remember receiving letters from my friend Stacey, who is like a sister. She'd written me several times. I was expecting her one Monday, patiently waiting to hear the guards say, "Inmate Fuller, Unit 5811, you have a visitor," but the announcement never came. After several hours, I called to see if she was okay. She answered the phone crying—when she'd reached the prison earlier that day, the officers told her I'd been transferred to another institution. She argued, but they were adamant. I knew something that Stacey didn't: this nasty business of tormenting visitors was common. Some correction officers are envious of the strong bonds that exist between inmates and their loved ones, or they want to wield a sadistic power over inmates.

I would like to say this was a onetime incident, but my friend Lasharra experienced the same type of treatment more than once. They would tell her to go home and change, knowing she'd driven seven hours to come see me, and she was wearing clothes that met all the regulations. They'd comment on her looks, telling her a sexy woman like her shouldn't wait around for a guy that was never going to get out, and tell her if she complained or didn't toe the line, they'd put me in The Hole. At the time, she didn't say anything to me because she didn't want to waste any of our short visits together on anything negative, plus she was worried I'd get angry and do something to get myself in trouble. She believes the guards at that prison were trying to

assert dominance over the visitors so they wouldn't want to come back, but also to push the inmate's buttons. Even the state seems to be going out of its way to make it tough for the inmates to receive visitors, putting the prison hundreds of miles away from urban areas, out in the middle of nowhere. Lasharra not only had to drive forever, she'd have to pay for a motel. Once, when she was visiting me in the federal correctional institution in Loretto, Pennsylvania, she was chased by several rowdy white guys in a nearby town called Johns Town, who were shouting racist and sexist threats. She made it back to her car and spent the night scared out of her mind, a dresser pushed in front of the door, and no one close by to comfort her.

Not all visitation experiences are that complicated or nerve-racking, but some are. When the visit is canceled, it's emotionally hard on your guest, just as it is for you, and especially when they've had to jump through so many hoops to make it happen. You need to make sure your family call ahead, that they have the right date, and that you are still eligible for a visit that day. An inmate might lose his visitation privileges as punishment and the administration doesn't have to notify anyone, so visitors should also call the day of the visit to make sure it's still on. But sometimes visits are canceled at the last minute because of bad luck, such as weather or prison-wide lockdowns. Make sure they know to adhere to that facility's dress code and only bring in what is allowed, so *they* are not the reason the visit is called off. One of my friends was turned away three times in a row when she tried to visit her boyfriend, once for wearing yoga pants, once for not having emptied her pockets, and once because they changed the visitation schedule without telling her.

Once in the visiting room, it's not always smooth sailing. I witnessed a lot of visitations go south when loved ones starting arguing. Usually, it was because the person on the outside was moving on or struggling to make ends meet. While it's true that family business needs to be taken care of, it's too bad when the conversation turns ugly because you have so limited time with your visitor. The prisoner has little to look forward to, and enough stress to deal with behind bars, so it's good for his morale if the time together is spent peacefully. However, it's not always the visitor who ruins the visitation.

One day my friend Rita came to visit while I was in FCI Petersburg, Virginia. We just happened to be in the visitation center at the same time that Tee, a convict on my cell block who came from West Virginia, got into

a disagreement with a woman I originally thought was his sister. It got loud, really quick. I glanced over just as he was tugging his wedding ring off. He handed it to the woman and said, “My woman is in here with me. Please don’t come back to see me.”

His wife cried profusely as Tee got up and walked out of the visiting room. The jerk had just broken the heart of his poor wife, who had stood by him through the trial and then incarceration. But, I have to admit, I was shocked to find out he *had* a wife. I can’t tell you how many times I saw him sitting around the commons room, chatting with his friends, when he’d get up and excuse himself, saying to the group, “Okay, I have to go get with my woman.” We all knew what he was talking about. Or, rather, who. He was obsessed with a transvestite named Michelle. Tee would walk the prison yard hand in hand with Michelle without any shame. He and Michelle met up and ate lunch and dinner together in the cafeteria as if he were on the streets, proud to take his woman to a five-star restaurant. They’d watch inmate basketball games in the gym, walk the track, go the library, walk to the commissary, etc. I’m sure his poor wife hadn’t seen it coming, and certainly wasn’t pleased to find out about his new love interest while in the visitation room, in front of dozens of pairs of eyes.

Video calls are starting to be offered as an option in some facilities, using a system similar to Skype, but it’s not common, and can cost families over a hundred dollars a month, usually around ten dollars for twenty minutes. They are monitored closely and recorded. The visitation schedules and dress and behavior is supposed to be what you’d see in a visiting center in the prison. Some opponents to video visitations worry that prisons will do away with in-person jail visits since fewer personnel are required. With no background checks or strip searches, it would be cheaper. But I can’t imagine doing away with that human contact.

I understand, as a former inmate, the strong desire to maintain contact with family and friends, coupled with wanting to maintain some control over the world beyond the wall, may cause a prisoner to make irrational decisions, like being careless on the telephone. Every conversation is recorded, so not only your time but your discussions are monitored. Phones are intended only for conversations with family or friends, and calls must be made collect or paid from the inmate’s account. Legal calls, made under the direct supervision of prison personnel, will not count against your three-hundred minutes per month, but that’s little comfort when you just want to

hear your baby girl babble on about her first day of school or a birthday party. If you are caught conducting business via phone, a sanction by the disciplinary hearing officer (DHO) can result in a loss of visitation, telephone, commissary, recreation, or movie privileges from a month to a year. You can also lose these privileges for unauthorized embracing or kissing while receiving a visit.

My job as a prison consultant is to encourage all family members to remain supportive through the use of the phone and in writing, but especially while visiting in person, if circumstances permit. A kind touch is so important, helping us to remember we are human, and that there is someone on the outside expecting us to return to them.

If you are one of the unfortunate inmates who does not have visitors, or if your family stops showing up, it is important you find a way to have a normal human conversation, speaking with a counselor or a minister, or even joining a support group or a writing group. The absolute hardest situation for an inmate is when he feels he's been betrayed. You have to remember that your loved ones are facing stuff you don't know about, and life isn't always easy. Again, you can let depression or anger make you hard or violent, or you can choose to deal with your grief and other emotions in a healthy way.

Snail mail will always be dear to those on the inside. Inmates do not have access to the Internet, which means they also do not have access to emails. Well, actually, some prisons have finally decided to move into the twenty-first century and have started using an online system that allows families to pay into an account so an inmate can receive and send monitored emails. The prisoner is only given a few minutes on the computer, however, and it can become expensive. If there is email available, there will be information on the prison's website.

While emails are nice because the response time is usually quicker, most inmates still want snail mail. You can pick up a letter and reread it, or pull out your child's drawing when you're feeling low. If you don't have anyone close to you, consider reaching out to an old friend or distant relative, maybe a teacher who meant something to you. They may or may not respond to a letter, but it can't hurt to try. I didn't have much family at the time, but I did have Stacey, my friend who agreed to write back and forth with me. We've remained close friends to this day. I will always have that girl's back.

Make sure not to draw or write anything on the envelope other than the prison return address and the address of the person you are writing to. Mail is usually picked up and delivered throughout the week. Some prisons will hold on to mail so inmates can receive letters on Saturdays while others only deliver Monday through Friday. Incoming mail is opened and scanned, though certified mail is only opened in your presence. If there is no return address on the envelope, you will not get it. If someone sends you a package with something that is unapproved, it will be returned or thrown away.

While they might be limited to paper and pen, your family and friends can still be creative. Ask them to print pages of jokes off the Internet and send those along. Or have them send copies of crossword puzzles or any kind of word or math or logic puzzle you'd come across in the newspaper. They could even make up a crossword using words and hints with a special meaning to your family. You could ask your family and friends to mail you pictures of themselves in different places you liked to go to together, or doing something funny—appropriate, of course. Better yet, some people have been making flip books out of photos of themselves by taking a series of shots over a minute's time. Then when you flip through the pages quickly, it looks like the person is moving. It is fun for your kid to make, and something to make you smile for years.

You could also start a writing project together. One of you writes a page of a creative story, mail it to the other, that person has to add another page to the story and mail it back. You could go on forever, if you wanted to. Or, like one of my cellies, you could do this with a risqué story, keeping your relationship "alive" by writing erotica together. Of course, you don't have to do this exchange with just fiction, you could also mail journal entries back and forth. Or read the same book at the same time and discuss that. The goal is simply to stay involved in each other's lives as best you can.

If your people want to do something really outside the box, they could always go online, look up a star registry, buy a star for thirty bucks, and name it after you or the family. Then they print the picture of the night sky, circle where your star is, and tell you where to look at night. Then you can look up at the same star and share a moment, even when you're hundreds of miles apart. Sure, it sounds sappy, but love is important.

Remember, it's just as important that you reach out to your family, to reassure them, as much as it is for them to stay in contact with you.

However you can.

## CHAPTER 7

# Classes / Self-Help Groups / Bible Studies / Counseling

4 P.M.

INSTEAD OF GOING to the yard, you might have decided to sit around your cell and mope. It would not be surprising if your cell mate comes back in, shirtless and sweaty, glares at you, and lies on his bunk with some old magazine, flipping furiously and grunting. You're gonna force yourself out when the next Ten-Minute Move bell rings. There must be somewhere to go.

Until I developed a small crew I trusted, I hated downtime. Too much time to think. Exercise did fill the minutes, but after a while that wasn't enough. My mind was searching for something to do, not just fret or boil. We'd have the four o'clock standing head count, and then I'd be staring at the walls, going stir-crazy.

I did discover one strategy that really worked for me, and that was to stop thinking about myself and focus on others. I started writing letters to people in my life, engaging with them about problems they were having with work or relationships. I found that talking through other people's problems helped take my mind off my own. My friend Stacey and I exchanged letters almost once a week, sometimes more, and we got into many philosophical and

spiritual discussions, making me think about the world on a deeper level. We talked a lot about our personal beliefs and life choices; I soon realized that as I was considering her issues and offering advice, I started to see my own life differently.

At one point, I began to spend time in the psychology department, which had its own library. I'd always enjoyed reading self-help and psychology-based books. The quiet area had a small room down the hall from the staff offices. The doctors grew comfortable seeing me in there; maybe they even thought I was crazy at first. I would settle in and read their books, or pop in a psychology-based VHS cassette, or listen to recordings of doctors who broke down human behavior, alcoholism, drug abuse, dysfunction within the family circle, and so on—basically all the stuff that prisoners are dealing with.

This led to short conversations with Dr. Andrea Boardman, a very kind, on-site psychologist, and another psychologist, Dr. Mark Chernizer. Dr. Chernizer and I would talk about our lives, or the conversation would drift toward my childhood, or my years just before prison. I admitted I hated the fact that I'd never been faithful to a woman, and that I knew, deep down, every hustler is seeking some sort of stability. Pimping women certainly hadn't provided that for me. He helped me come to terms with several issues I would not have been able to understand on my own, and I'll forever be grateful to him for that.

Most importantly, I started to see that maybe I could put my bored brain to good use and reach out to others, help them get a little more square with their lives. There were plenty of unhappy prisoners around me.

Eventually, I pitched the idea of putting together a twelve-week mentoring program to help new inmates who were having a problem adapting to prison and to provide them with coping mechanisms. I liked the idea that I'd be getting out of my cell while also doing something helpful.

The chief psychiatrist, Dr. Marcia Baruch, agreed, though she also wanted me to work with those who were suicidal. Fort Dix already had an inmate suicide watch team in place, so she partnered me with another inmate, John Christian; he was a fantastic guy, a Harvard graduate with a master's degree in education. He also had an extensive background in drug and alcohol counseling and loved to meditate and teach meditation.

I worked with him and a team of inmates, taking four-hour shifts and watching inmates who were admittedly suicidal. They would be placed in a

holding tank on the first floor in the hospital. With huge windows and no privacy, we'd watch them sleep, wake up, eat, use the bathroom, occasionally talk to us, pace the holding tank back and forth, and then fall back asleep.

One of the saddest cases was a guy from Hungary. He'd been living in poverty and unknowingly became a drug mule when promised money to deliver a suitcase to the United States. If he'd opened the suitcase, he would have known it was full of drugs, but he didn't and was arrested when his plane landed in the United States. His command of the English language was severely lacking and he barely understood his charges from the time of arrest through the sentencing. Although he'd been in prison a few years, the realization set in that he had at least fourteen years to go, even though he'd been duped. He wanted to die. He simply stopped eating. He remained on suicide watch for two days, continuing to starve himself, before he was transferred to another facility, likely a hospital. I felt helpless and somewhat angry. He'd reached a point in his incarceration where he'd gone so deep inside himself, no soul inside the prison could touch his heart. I genuinely believed he did not know what he was getting into. I'm afraid he did end up killing himself once he left.

I discovered how good it felt to help others while also giving my brain something to do while I was trapped behind bars. I created an outline for a class to help habitual criminals "kick the habit." The doctor tweaked it, and then I ran it past several inmates, including my best friend and former drug kingpin, Tommy Mickens. I called the program *Criminals Anonymous* and it was a hit. Tommy and I had a waiting list of four hundred men trying to get in. We put together two more classes called *Criminal Lifestyles* and *Men's Issues*. It really helped the men understand so much about themselves, and Tommy and I actually began to form relationships with inmates we'd usually never associate with because of the institutionalized race divisions. Dr. Baruch helped us develop counseling skills to aid in our ability to facilitate the group. She was incredibly smart and I truly believe she wanted me to succeed when I left prison. She saw I had a desire to continue mentoring people once I was released. She even wrote a letter of recommendation for me. I've taken the chance she gave me and turned it into something real, here on the outside.

Having specific daily and weekly goals, as well as being disciplined, will give meaning to your day. Classes, self-help groups, counselors, and religion can help you attain that discipline and keep it going. You've got real people here who can help you, if you seek them out. The inmates who need to look the hardest, though, are the inmates who've come in with addictions.

My friend, you should start going through withdrawal before you're dumped behind the wall, if you can. Because if you decide to go to the prison black market for cigarettes, you're going to pay, one way or another. If you're seeking drugs or alcohol, the cost is going to be exorbitant. And this is not the place to fall behind in payments. You've got to find the strength to kick the habit. Luckily, most prisons do have addiction management counselors or groups; I highly recommend you take full advantage of the programs that are in place. I've seen guys go in with a drinking habit and not make it out.

Your addiction might be why you've landed in jail in the first place. Or, as it is for many inmates, it may be your anger. Some inmates have mandatory sessions with anger management counselors as part of their sentence. Be honest with yourself: If you find yourself getting irrationally angry over things like the mail or the wrong kind of green beans, and you let that anger become rage ... you have a problem. If you were arrested because you took a swing at a cop, you have a problem. If you have hit your spouse or your kids, you have a problem. If you can't keep your cool when a convict flips you crap, you're gonna have a problem. Join one of the anger management groups, where they will teach you tricks on how to de-escalate yourself and others.

Learning to meditate and/or pray is another way to manage your addictions, anger, or depression. Most institutions have contemplative programs for secular inmates interested in meditation, yoga, or focused thought. For those who are religious, or are seeking spiritual help, there are court rulings in place to protect your right to worship, unless it is obvious your goal is to create dysfunction on the premises. Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist practices remain the most common. Clergy members and services are available to all prisoners as a source of support if you wish to seek emotional and spiritual health.

Sometimes prisons will bring in creative writing instructors, and you can use this time to process your problems by writing them out. Even if there is

not an official class for journaling or writing as a meditative tool, I highly recommend you do it on your own. But the prison will offer other classes and you should be taking advantage of the free education.

For instance, you can take classes to help you understand your own legal rights and where you're at in the process. Of course, you can meet with your preapproved attorney at any time (usually within business hours), but that attorney is going to bill you or your family for every phone call and visit. Now is the perfect time to figure out what you can do to legally help yourself.

This isn't always as black and white as it sounds, though. The Supreme Court established that prisoners have a fundamental right to access the courts, which also means access to the prison's law library. Penitentiaries generally have the most equipped and updated law books and journals, better than the state systems. The inmates who work in the law library can be helpful; some have law degrees or are self-taught. They can provide you with the appropriate state and federal rules and regulations, and can help with certified mailing.

But you have to be careful to not let this consume you. Inmates who become obsessive activists are often targeted. Also, some officers have been known to block the mailing of lawsuits, or they can take away legal materials, deny access to the law library, stall, or refuse to give you legal material. Officers are well aware that a successful litigation can change the games being played behind prison walls or restrict some of the power some inmates wield recklessly. It's not uncustomary to see officers take away legal possessions, put the inmate in the SHU or Hole on trumped-up charges, or even put them on an airplane to another prison to stifle their attempts for legal help. I'm not trying to scare you away from helping yourself legally, I'm just saying to do it prudently. And if you are forced to give it up, make sure you have not allowed it to be your only source of hope.

Prisons usually offer classes that teach skills to benefit a job on the outside. If you struggle with reading, this is the perfect time for you to get on top of that, even to work toward your GED. Everyone knows it's challenging for an ex-con to get a decent job, so you might as well do what you can to make reentry easier. One suggestion is to start your own business. You can start by taking business classes while in jail, learning how to write business plans, deal with overhead, or start your own LCC. If

you have access to online classes, or classes through the mail, you can focus on what you might want to do. Want to open a landscaping business? Take a botany class online. Want to start a bakery? Take a class in baking styles or designing a commercial kitchen.

Do something. Give your brain a job.

If you find the depression or the fear is out of your control, counselors are available.

By the time I was in FCI Fort Dix, too many men I knew had let the darkness take them over. Too many suicides. I started volunteering my time to facilitate various programs with the prison's psychology department. I certainly learned a lot about inmate suicide. For instance, far more suicides occur in county jails than in state or federal prisons. Of the 918 jail deaths in 2010, 305 (33.2 percent) were attributed to suicide. Of the 3,232 prison deaths that year, 215 (6.7 percent) were suicides. The statistics are tracked by the Department of Justice, which also states that nearly half of the local jail suicides between 2000 and 2010 took place within seven to ten days of admission—and were highest among white, older male inmates. Yet fewer white males enter the prison system than black, Latino or other ethnicities. Frankly—and unfortunately—blacks and Latinos are often better equipped to handle the chaos and mayhem of the county jail. Many are from the surrounding neighborhoods or adjacent townships. The chances of low-, middle-, or upper-class whites having family or friends living close by, or in a county jail, or in a state or federal prison, are slim to none. These people don't generally have comrades on the inside, nor do they have family stories to help them along.

Why is the rate higher at county jails than in the prisons? For a new inmate, the shock and awe of being incarcerated is overwhelming. The violence is real and unpredictable. And there are several plots unfolding throughout each holding tank, dorm room, or pod, putting you at risk. Also, there is no psychiatric evaluation for new inmates, not until they are moved to their permanent housing, so the person who may have a psychological problem prior to incarceration may see himself in a bleak situation right out of the gate, or he may be a danger to others. If individuals with obvious mental health issues who engage in criminal activity are taken to a county jail, they are thrown into solitary confinement. They are ignored like a five-year-old dishrag, which adds a heavy burden to their depression.

Prison is hard; that's all there is to it. You're now surrounded by drunks, drug addicts, drug dealers, pedophiles, rapists, and murderers, many who are anxious and angry and going through withdrawal. And, of course, you're dealing with your own stuff, missing your family and your normal routine, your bed, your ability to eat and shower when you want, or to do so safely.

Yet ... you are alive. You have a roof over your head. You have food. You have the time to learn, maybe grow, if you choose.

Obviously, not everyone takes advantage of the classes or the self-help groups, which may be one reason the recidivism rate is so high. You're in for now, but once you're free, do you want to return? Most convicts say no, but the truth is an estimated two-thirds (69 percent) of 405,000 prisoners released in thirty states were arrested for a new crime within three years of release, and three-quarters (77 percent) were arrested within five years, according to a recent Bureau of Justice report.

The prison experience contributes to recidivism, of course, thanks to the institutionalized violence and the state treating inmates inhumanely, like a widget in a factory. While at FCI Fairton, at least one-third of the inmates with whom I spent time within the SHU were rearrested within two to seven years.

Part of this is due to the mentally ill or the emotionally unstable being placed in a prison instead of a mental institution. When they're released from the ruthless environment of prison, these people don't understand how the outside differs from the inside, and cannot readjust to societal norms. On the inside, it's fine, even encouraged, to throat punch someone who cuts in front of you in line. Waiting in line at a suburban McDonald's ... not so much.

The same holds true for the convicts who are in too long and become institutionalized. The outside is too different, particularly if you've been released from the isolation of disciplinary segregation. For every inmate released, addictions and gang affiliations and criminal tendencies are like minefields that need to be carefully traversed, all while you are under a microscope by your community and local law enforcement agencies, and you are most likely also dealing with the strain on your family.

You're also under immediate pressure to find employment or risk violating the terms and conditions of parole, probation, or supervised release. This may seem relatively simple to some people, but how can a

newly released inmate gain employment without ID? For example, if they live in New Jersey, they need six pieces of ID when they arrive at the motor vehicles department. A birth certificate (with a raised seal), pilot license, US college identification card (with transcript), social security card, mail with a home address (not prison), and a debit card are a few examples, yet a felon doesn't have anything current except a birth certificate. In order to obtain these documents, time and money are needed to schedule appointments and to travel. Many don't have the financial means to seek necessary counseling, travel in search of employment, find health care, or enroll in college classes. Most importantly, though, if they don't have family willing to house them, they must find a homeless shelter or some other reportable address or they will be dragged back to prison. All felons on parole must have an address.

The wealthier inmates might not have some of these concerns, but reentry is hard no matter who you are. You will never be allowed to forget that part of your life, no matter how badly you will want to.

Unfortunately, some people can't make the transition.

My friend Mike, the guy who had to defend himself in the broom closet, was finally released from prison but felt he could not return to his hometown or his family. He chose to reside with a woman he'd met while in prison. Soon, it became clear she was jealous and rebuked him when his fellow inmates, the only friends he had left, would call and want to discuss the outside world. He did manage to find a job, but within six months an argument turned ugly and police were called to their home. With the house surrounded by law enforcement, Mike decided to kill himself rather than return to prison.

Prison has power, even beyond its walls. But so do you. Inside and out.

I want to repeat what I said earlier: having specific goals and being disciplined will give meaning to your day. Inside and out.

# CHAPTER 8

## The Commissary

6 P.M.

LET'S SAY CELLIE looks up from the commissary checklist he's filling out and says, "You got money in your account yet?" You shrug and just look at him.

He'll snort and say something like, "Whatever. Just seein' if you want me to get you a candy bar."

You say, "I really appreciate the offer, but I'm good, thanks."

You're probably not good, not really, and you'd chew off your arm for a goddamn candy bar, but there's no way you're telling this guy about your money situation, and you're sure the hell not going to owe him over a bite of cheap, waxy chocolate. You can hold out until next week. Hopefully, your funds are available by then. Otherwise, another seven days from now, you might be ready to sell your soul for an expired Ding Dong.

Commissaries stock mostly personal hygiene items, snacks, and some small electronics. I found different prisons had different items for sale, some with better brands and healthier snack choices, others stocked with powdery shampoo and greasy crap such as Funyuns and Honey Buns. But all of them provided the most important thing: a small slice of normalcy.

When I first went in, I was at a county jail. Just like you, I'd never been in prison before. Suddenly, I had nothing. After a few days, when I was

handed the one-page commissary inventory sheet and told I could buy up to five items if there was money in my account, I was actually surprised so many items were allowed. I was prepared to have nothing.

The basics are pretty simple. Most commissaries schedule a day and time for you to “shop,” once per week. In most county jails, commissary slips are handed out and collected the day before, and the commissary is brought back to your cell. In medium and maximum security joints, sometimes you will present your list when you show up and they will gather what is available. Other places will ask you to turn in a list at least one day ahead of time, having you fill out a checklist or simply writing down requests. There is no guarantee you will get what you ask for, but listen to the jailhouse chatter—the biggest source of gossip swirls around what’s new and what’s missing from the commissary shelves, as these guys rework their lists over and over before it’s their turn to order. Complaining when the commissary runs out of something will do you no good. It will only irritate the guy in charge of your supply list the following week. This is not the guy to piss off when you run out of deodorant or toothpaste.

When you first go in, it’s nice if you can put a one-time \$400 to \$500 in to your account to set yourself up, but you can easily get by on \$200. If nothing else, hopefully someone can send you \$20; you’ll need it to get at least some toothpaste, shampoo, and stamps. Whatever cash you were arrested with in your pockets will automatically be applied to your account.

If you have family that can help you, it’s best if you can add \$200 to \$300 in your account each month; this is usually the maximum they would be allowed to give you anyway. You’ll most likely be making only \$20 or \$30 from your prison work detail, which you can have put directly into your commissary account or send to your family. There will be a limit to how much you can spend at a time; usually it’s \$300 per month in federal institutions, but that is more than enough to get what you need, plus a few comfort snacks.

Commissaries were created because it became problematic allowing certain items to be brought in by family and friends as gifts, many of whom were using it as a way to hide illegal contraband. This also allowed for a much bigger black market, giving prisoners a lot of leverage over another inmate for a bar of soap. Now, you should be able to buy at least the necessary basics. But your purchases will be monitored, to make sure you’re not stocking up to run trades, or that you’re not buying items to

create a weapon of some kind. This one is tough to enforce, however, since weapons can be made out of anything, which I'll discuss in a minute.

Many inmates who do not have a lot of money will be interested to see what you can afford once money is posted to your account. If you're bringing armloads worth of stuff back to your cell, they're going to notice. Convicts will use your money against you. Some will merely "borrow" items or have you purchase items for them. Others will extort money from you or force you to join their gang. So be smart; don't flash your commissary "wealth" around, and immediately lock up your stuff.

Damien D., currently on the inside, suggests, "When you first get here, you should immediately buy your hygiene products and then always stay stocked up on them. Once you order your stuff, it can take up to two weeks before you get it, so if you run out of something, you could be burnt for a while. If that happens, someone could lend you a bar of soap, but if they are caught it is an infraction, since it is against the Federal Bureau of Prisons Department of Corrections policy to borrow, lend, or trade, even in these situations. Both parties in a transaction like that get in trouble, so it's best not to even ask a friend to risk it. Besides, you never want to be in debt to anyone, even if it's something as small as a bar of soap."

From experience, I can tell you the following items are useful. You might want to buy them over a period of time, to avoid notice, and to make sure you're living "within your means," though I'd get the lock, shower shoes, shampoo, and toothpaste right away—and the coffee, if you're getting caffeine headaches, but you'll have to figure out how to make it in the microwave if you don't have a hot pot.

- Shower shoes
- A combination lock
- Toothpaste/ toothbrush/shampoo/ laundry soap
- Reading glasses
- Aspirin
- Instant noodles
- Coffee
- Can opener
- Cans of tuna / chicken
- Nail clipper
- Comb

- Earbuds / radio / MP3 player / batteries
- Extension cord
- Hot pot (Crock-Pot)
- Hot sauce / soy sauce / ketchup
- Notebook or stationary
- Stamps
- Sunscreen / sunglasses/ rain poncho
- Socks / underwear
- Sneakers
- Thermal underwear

If you find yourself worrying about your safety, watch what others are buying from the commissary. There are a few items inmates can purchase that they might use as weapons—or that you can buy to be used as last-resort protection. A combination lock or can of food swung in a sock. Dental floss as a garrote. The jagged edge of a can lid as a blade, folded in half with a cloth grip. A Hershey bar melted in the microwave and thrown in the face. Women like to use the paper “club,” a rolled newspaper, dunked in the toilet, then rolled even tighter, and left to dry so it becomes rock hard.

The most creative weapon I ever saw was a spiked workout glove. A young homey of mine, Chris from Houston, Texas, was a boxer before he entered the prison system. He'd been in several confrontations while we were in FCI Ashland, Kentucky, prison. He was approximately five foot eight and weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds. He was in phenomenal shape but really needed an edge (a shank) to carry out a vendetta on another inmate. One day, he showed me a pair of spiked gloves he'd created. He'd obtained thumbtacks from the education department and poked at least ten through each glove. Then he slid a second pair of gloves inside to prevent the tacks from moving. The spiked gloves could easily slit holes in vital arteries and rip skin. He'd walk around with the gloves hanging out of his back pocket; no corrections officer was the wiser since they looked like a simple pair of workout gloves.

If someone is coming for you, be on the lookout for the most popular of weapons: the shank, which is any object brought to a sharpened point in order to stab, or to “shiv.” Just so you know, in some state prisons, prisoners found in possession of weapons are charged with a third degree felony and are going to spend time in The Hole. In the federal prison system, an inmate

found in possession of a shank or any weapon can be put in The Hole for a very long time, lose commissary and phone privileges, in addition to being shipped to another prison. Unfortunately, violent convicts with long prison sentences don't care about additional time.

As a matter of fact, one guy who didn't care about adding time to his sentence set himself up with a nice side hustle selling shanks. He was a crazy Puerto Rican named Lexio who was around five foot five and weighed a hundred and twenty pounds soaking wet. This Lexio had crooked, rotten teeth, and yet was considered handsome, probably in part because he was very particular about his clean-cut appearance. Unfortunately, the guy just couldn't figure out how to successfully reenter the chaos of society on the outside and so became notorious for being released and returning to prison within six months. He ran his hustle like a booster who would come through the neighborhood with a bag of stolen goods. Lexio would say, "Hey Doc, I got something to show you," and it would always be a different shape or size of shank. His shanks would cost anywhere from five to fifteen dollars in stamps, depending on the size. Some were made from melted plastic, or plastic and metal, or steel from things like broken chair legs or a door trim. Anything, really, that can be turned into a sharp, deadly weapon.

Even a small prison can collect over four hundred shanks a year, made from materials such as pieces of fence, to mop handles, to broken lightbulb rims, to melted-down Jolly Ranchers molded into a spearhead and bound to a toothbrush. I saw smuggled cigarette lighters being used to melt several plastic forks together to make a shank with a handle. The "beauty" of this weapon was that you could mold it to fit your hand perfectly.

There are some creative bastards in prison.

# CHAPTER 9

## Socializing

7 P.M.

IT'S PROBABLY NOT movie night, so the night is wide open. You're looking at hours more of nothing. Your cell mate, he's filling his time, picking at his toes. There's got to be someone out there you can talk to.

Assume the worst of everyone. Remember: You may come to consider someone a trusted confidante, but he was someone else's friend before he met you. Don't think your personal business will not be leaked out and used against you at some point.

In order to stay sane, you're going to have to make human contact. When you've got time to openly socialize, you *should* engage with others, build alliances, and keep yourself entertained. Wisely.

As you start circulating among inmates, respect others by using their preferred name. If an inmate is called "Leftover Louie," "Old Head," or "Money Mike," use that name. More than likely, he's earned that handle in prison, or he's carried the name since childhood. If an open homosexual calls himself "Michelle," "Cherry," or "Cindy," respectfully call him by his name of choice. Some of these guys might look feminine, but they are still men, and they will transform into fighting machines right before your eyes

if you decide to refer to them by the name on their birth certificate. That's why some refer to prison homosexuals as "Transformers."

Along these lines, if you come from a neighborhood where it's common to call your friends "gay," "punk," "faggot," or "bitch," stop it. It is the quickest death sentence you can inflict upon yourself. Those words immediately categorize someone as soft, incapable of holding his own. In essence, you're posturing, claiming, "You are not a man. You are a woman who engages in anal and oral sex. I can strong-arm you and take your belongings or your manhood."

If other inmates know about the name calling, they will expect that inmate to harm you; reputations are protected at all costs. So, keep your mouth shut, even when you see things you might normally mock as being "gay." For instance, men who are not homophobic often have their hair braided by other men, though straight men never do so behind closed doors. Some prisons have gay cell blocks to prevent homosexuals from being harassed, raped, or killed, but most don't. If you are a homosexual, the wisest course of action is to keep it to yourself.

Anyway, let's say you've wandered into the common room, and you've steered clear of those with obvious bad attitudes. A couple of guys playing hearts agree to let you sit in, and you've politely exchanged names. You'll hear gossip and maybe see a couple of prison schemes unfold; keep quiet. If you see trouble brewing, go to another area immediately, but if all is calm, be a good sport. Remember to keep your comments nonpersonal, light, and respectful. Just like at a dinner party, you don't bring up politics or religion.

If there's gambling at the game, use common sense. You can travel the world and it will be unlikely you'll find a population of individuals who love to gamble more than inmates, but a lot of violence stems from gambling debts. Are you a candidate for accruing debt? Yes. After all, didn't you gamble on getting away with the crime that landed you in prison in the first place? I am not a sociologist, but I firmly believe there is a high correlation between committing crimes and gambling. On the inside, people tend to gamble for the thrill of the "quick fix," a desire to pass time, an adrenaline rush, or simply to fit in with other inmates.

It's one thing if you're gambling with toothpicks or Cheerios, but a whole different ball game if you're trying to bet with "money" you don't have. Debts can be paid through commissary (cigarettes and stamps are a favorite), specific requests (including sexual favors), or your cafeteria

meals. But it's just too risky. If you can't pay your debt, you're screwed. Without a gang, you are an island unto yourself, and you will not know who has been paid to come after you to settle the debt. Stop gambling before your head gets stomped. Even if you belong to a gang, I recommend you do not gamble. If you think your gang will protect you when you lose a bet and can't pay other gang members or races, I have a news flash for you: Your fellow gang members will punish you. It is not uncommon for gangs to beat their members severely with a lock inside a sock due to such foolishness. While the gang's obligation is to protect you, your failure to pay a debt to opposing factions can lead to a tremendous gang or race riot, putting everyone in danger. Expect to be severely thrashed, or worse.

You've got plenty of gambling opportunities while you're behind bars, from card games, to professional and college sports, to in-house competitions among inmates for push-ups, pull-ups, fights, etc.

Nearly every prison has a sports ticket man, the guy running the sports bets. He's usually a resourceful inmate, and the ones I came across were quite often white guys. The most memorable was Sports Ticket Timmy. There isn't a doubt in my mind that he had to deal with a heap of crap, considering his clientele were those who ran some kind of scam prior to entering prison. You could hear Timmy debating with inmates who would claim they'd placed a bet for this or that or took the points for that or this. Timmy usually worked with at least five guys who helped him give out tickets. The perk for the runners was that they could place their own bets. Some runners collect money, stash stamps (stamps were for prison bets with Timmy), or hide multiple copies of every bet taken in case an officer got a tip on his business and decided to shake him down.

Timmy had to be alert and wily. It was no little thing if he was caught. If an officer shakes your locker down and find what they call "gambling paraphernalia" you will definitely be placed in disciplinary segregation, lose commissary privileges, and possibly get shipped out of the prison.

Rarely do you find prison bookies not willing to pay debts. Prison bookies are similar to Vegas and Atlantic City bookies—you can't break them. When some freakish bet takes place and a lot of money is owed by the bookie, arrangements are made where stamps are paid or someone from the outside will put money on the account of the inmate who placed the bet.

Ticket Timmy would usually pay out his bets around noon each day. That's plenty of time to find out the scores of each game that took place the

night before. He would calculate his winners, count out the stamps owed to each person, and have his men pass out new tickets. Betting tickets for baseball, football, and basketball, along with the point spreads, would be handed out.

Nothing made Timmy's prison life more hectic than the NCAA Championship, World Cup, and Super Bowl. He'd ramp up his help but promote his regular runners to the trusted position of money men. He'd also keep a few thugs on his payroll in case someone tried to check into Administrative Segregation if they couldn't come up with the money for the bet.

I remember sitting in the television room in Ashland one morning, along with a roomful of sports fans and gamblers, all of them in rare form. They were practically foaming at the mouth as the Dallas Cowboys versus Buffalo Bills Super Bowl would be kicking off within the hour. Guys were shouting, "This is a lock for Buffalo!" Nobody believed Buffalo could lose four straight Super Bowls. A lot of guys wanted in on the action. One inmate from Ohio named Big K hadn't had a chance to hand his ticket in because he had been with family in the visitors' room—but he had a reputation for lingering when it was time to pay his debt, so Timmy refused to take his bet. Big K was furious. He snatched Ticket Timmy by the shirt to intimidate him but several inmates swarmed Big K and nearly killed him. The commotion and beat down happened so fast I hardly had a chance scramble out of my seat to avoid getting trampled in the process. I was shocked the closest officer didn't hear anything because his office was in the vicinity of the television room.

Later, I learned the inmates were not particularly interested in Ticket Timmy because he was their friend, but because he controlled the potential Super Bowl winning bet. Anyone who interfered with that was considered dispensable.

Most inmates don't realize gambling is a losing proposition. Always keep this in mind: If you owe as little as \$5, the debtor will pay \$10 to have someone punish you. The lines in prison are long for inmates who can use \$10. If you are expecting money in your account on Tuesday and funds are not credited to your account that day, your debt could increase by 100 percent per day. If the mail is delayed due to weekends or holidays, there will be no mercy. Failure to pay your gambling debts on time can get you killed.

While gambling should be avoided, bartering is a great way to spend your socializing time, as long as you're smart about it. You can trade a magazine or book for instant noodles or other snacks. If you need something, think about what you can trade for it and who might want what you have. Be careful, though. Don't go spouting off about all your belongings. Someone might just take them.

Anything can be bartered. There has and will never be a more profitable bartering tool in the prison system than magazines with naked women. The filthier the magazine, the higher the rent. I knew a guy named Money Murphy who hustled like crazy in order to rent the raunchy magazines he lived for. He worked in food service as a dishwasher; I'd often see his coat puffed out like Santa's as he'd leave the food service area loaded down with tomatoes, raw chicken, eggs, fish, or something else he could sell in order to rent his beloved *Black Tail*, *Players Girls*, *Sugah*, and *Black Beauties*.

Smoking and alcohol are prohibited, but both are a big part of the black market bartering system. If you are foolish enough to use drugs while in prison, just know you are embarking on a hasty trip to self-inflicted suffering. If a corrections officer catches you with drugs, you may face outside charges, possibly a trip to The Hole, and the cancelation of phone privileges and visits, since they will rightfully assume a friend or family member smuggled them into prison for you.

The street value of drugs multiplies exponentially in prison, which means you won't be able to afford your addiction for long. There's also the likelihood of a drug overdose with heroin and cocaine, especially if you've been drug-free for months or years. As a prison consultant, I always encourage individuals who are self-surrendering to go in drug- and alcohol-free, and be prepared to face down temptation. Despite all the body searches and room checks, drugs are prevalent. It's amazing how easy it is for some criminals to smuggle in drugs if they're creative.

In FCI Fairton, there was a huge white guy named Nasty Mike. He was a primary source for smuggling heroin into the prison, using his visitors as mules. His method of getting past the guards was based on understanding human nature, and he never got caught, not to my knowledge. He had very large rolls of fat and would tuck the drugs into the layers under his stomach. He would intentionally refrain from showering and show up in the visitation room smelling like roadkill. Officers were squeamish about stepping close to Nasty Mike, much less asking him to bend over, spread his butt cheeks,

and cough. He'd gross them out further by intentionally coughing near their faces and making snot come out of his nose. He seized on their weak stomachs in order to bring small amounts of heroin back onto the prison compound. He lived like an absolute king.

His entire crew of drug runners were stand-up Spanish guys. On a few occasions, he asked me if I wanted a part in making some great money while in prison. I never thought twice about it, always answering respectfully with "No thanks." Not only had I stopped selling drugs prior to entering federal prison, I'd seen firsthand young and old men alike become addicted to drugs while behind bars. Besides dealing with the physical side effects, they were always in debt, which resulted in beatings and risky behavior. Most of the addicts end up stealing—like the guys in food service who risk taking food out of the cafeteria each day—to keep the drugs flowing. Others call family members for money, or they gamble, to pay the dealers like Nasty Mike. I've never seen a coke or heroin addict keep the support of his family for the duration of his incarceration. It's much too expensive a habit for everybody involved. After a period of time, it ends one way or another, but never well. Besides risking an overdose, addicts quickly owe far too much to the dealers and so will try and check into protective custody; otherwise, they are seriously hurt. It always comes to a screeching halt.

Even if you can pay your tab, sources can easily dry up, forcing you to go into withdrawal. Officers who deal can be rotated to other housing units, causing smuggling operations to cease at a moment's notice. Your convict drug connection can get busted. If this happens, you have to worry about more than the shakes; if he is facing serious time, he might dime you out, particularly if he's scheduled to be released in the near future.

Speaking of snitches ... don't be one.

If you happen to see a drug deal go down or hear a hit being discussed when you're sitting through that game of cards, you just keep your mouth shut. One of the best things you can do in prison is to see and hear everything going on in your immediate environment and yet say nothing. Correctional officers may ask you for information about an incident involving other inmates or confiscated contraband. Simply claim you were looking the other way and didn't see or hear anything. While this may irritate the staff, they will likely understand your need for self-preservation.

As I said before, refrain from starting conversations with guards or being seen inside their office, unless it's necessary, because other prisoners will assume you are snitching. If the population believes you're an informant—working for the authorities when you come in—those who associate with you will have an ulterior motive. Otherwise, why would anyone in prison want to associate with a snitch? It would make more sense to swallow a Bengay and Ajax sandwich than to be friends with a snitch.

One snitch can harm a lot of people. In the 1980s, drug kingpin Rayful Edmond III was sent to prison for running the District of Columbia's largest-ever cocaine operation.

On the inside, Rayful had major credibility as a drug dealer and, although Lewisburg housed several former drug kingpins, he had a number of fans—fans he had no problem taking advantage of. Rayful would talk inmates into introducing him to girls who would be willing to bring drugs into the prison for him. Unbeknownst to them, several inmates ended up getting additional prison time because Rayful snitched them out for doing what he'd asked them to do; he decided to cooperate with the FBI and DC police in exchange for a possible reduced prison term for his mother. The women and young men who were bringing drugs to the prison for Rayful were also put in prison. He even snitched on his own girlfriend, Nicole Etienne, who served a few years in prison because of him.

There will always be guys looking for a way out and so they cowardly agree to be a snitch. You need to watch what you say because anyone can be wearing a wire and you'd never know. If you think revealing your involvement in some unsolved Ponzi scheme, or inside trade, murder, or drug deal you pulled off is the way to endear yourself to other inmates, think again. It's flat-out stupid and reckless to brag about unsolved crimes you committed on the outside. Your fellow inmates will leap at the opportunity to help federal or state authorities solve the crime in the hope that doing so will reduce their own sentence. Prisons are flooded with a new breed of criminals who are flat-out weak. Stand-up guys are as rare as an eclipse.

You might meet some nice guys over a game of checkers. Maybe even some stand-up guys. Or maybe a few snitches. Another type you might run into is the guy who wants to introduce you to his female friends—girls who will write, visit, or bring contraband or drugs into prison for you. It's a common offer to new inmates. You don't need this kind of companionship.

You will owe the inmate if you take him up on his “favor,” turning your two-year term into a life sentence by involving you in schemes to smuggle contraband into prison. Also, if you have a spouse, she will find out. She’s hurting enough with you on the inside. Respect your woman.

Besides seeing card games and gossip sessions in the common room, and a guy getting his hair braided or trimmed, you’re bound to come across a jailhouse tattoo artist peddling his wares. The movies get this part of the culture right: tattoos are popular in prison. The tattoo artists are respected and paid well for their services.

The coolest tattoo I saw was on an inmate who had a picture of twelve people sitting in a jury box and underneath was a gun and a coffin. Above, it read, “I’d rather be judged by 12 then carried by 6.” He explained it meant it was better to be judged by twelve jury members and sent to prison than to have six men carry his coffin to a graveyard.

It’s amazing what these artists can do, creating tattoo guns with parts scavenged from small electronics available in the commissary. The homemade ink comes from mixing soap and water with the black soot made by burning Vaseline or Baby Oil. Pieces broken off window screens are commonly used to make the needles.

Think twice before you get a prison tatt, though. While the art can be amazing, or tough, or used to show your gang affiliation, it can also make you sick—like, deathly sick. If the artist isn’t careful with his needles, you can easily contract Hepatitis C or HIV, which are rampant behind bars.

Another inmate who is usually well respected is the guy who’s been around awhile and has shown the ability to mediate between offended parties. The common area is sometimes the scene of a sit-down with three or more guys, hashing out their differences before someone gets badly hurt or killed. Prison has its fair share of people who are violent for no reason, but a lot of guys would rather find a peaceful solution, as long as their reputation stays intact.

I had a very dear friend at FCI Loretto in Pennsylvania, who prior to prison wasn’t a street guy. However, he ended up behind bars because he got involved in a street deal that went bad. And he was the reason the deal went south, getting everyone involved arrested. Unfortunately, they were all locked up together. They didn’t care that it was an accident—they put a hit out on him.

I agreed to mediate because I knew both parties, and both respected me. I knew the guy, José, who ordered the hit because we'd been to seven prisons together, both of us aggressively going after molesters and snitchers, working out our rage and frustration on scum but getting ourselves constantly booted. I knew what this guy was capable of and I was worried for my friend, so I offered to help. Normally, I would not get involved but I had common ground with José because of our background and because both of us were involved in religious organizations in the prison. José agreed to talk with my friend, one-on-one, with me present as the mediator. José was loud, very loud, yelling and pounding on the table—it wasn't a comfortable meeting. My friend stayed calm and humble, admitting he screwed up the deal and was very honestly apologetic. They were able come to an understanding by the end of the meeting. José promised to remove the hit, and he kept his word, even though other guys from that deal were not happy about it. José was highly respected and luckily put his neck out for my friend, who remained loyal to José from that point on.

Any time issues can be resolved peacefully, obviously that's the way to go. You just have to be willing to sit down and listen, apologize honestly if you need to, and hope you have a good mediator in your dorm.

No matter what's going on, every convict looks forward to Friday night: Movie Night. You will, too. The movies are chosen by the COs, but they're usually blockbusters, something everyone can enjoy, though they tend to stay away from anything that glorifies gangs or violence or has a lot of sex. Fridays tend to be pretty calm because most guys don't want to lose their movie privileges.

Movie night generally follows the same rules that apply to the TV room the rest of the week. You will probably have the opportunity to watch regular TV during your daily free time, but be prepared for the rules. First and foremost, you are not going to have a say in what is on the TV, not for years.

In the last prison I was in, there were two television rooms for the dorm. An old-time inmate made the weekly schedule for each room. One room was dedicated to sports while the other was for regularly scheduled television programs and nightly news; at least 60 percent of the dorm had to agree on the program.

Respect must be shown in the television room. Don't talk over a program, and never change the channel without permission. That's a suicide

mission. Inmates work out their television viewing schedules weeks, seasons, even years ahead of time. It is their lifeline to the outside world, a way of numbing the pain of prison life, so they will defend it at all costs. Sports rule the television room in prison if there's only one TV. Even corrections officers are leery of interfering with sports programs.

Normally, prisons will shut televisions off between 10:00 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. Those hours are extended for events such as the Super Bowl, World Cup Soccer, NBA finals, World Series, and championship boxing, if the facility is equipped with cable.

Prisoners like to save their best snacks for movie night or their favorite show. Just because it might feel chummy when you're all watching the same program, don't ask people for food. Bring your own. You don't want to become known as a mooch. There was only one guy I ever knew who could get away with that: Big Baby. Inmates really liked the big Georgia boy with his southern accent and friendly personality. Big Baby was a dark black fat guy with an Afro who stood around five feet ten inches and weighed every bit of three-hundred pounds. He never got tired of eating other peoples' food. I was appalled when I first saw him wandering around and looking at the food in other inmates' Tupperware bowls. I thought, *This rude dude is going to get it.* But no. No one seemed to care. Once in a while, he'd have food of his own and would offer some to others sitting near him, but more often than not, when other inmates came close he'd look at them and nod his head as if to say "whaddya' got there?" Inmates would put their bowl within his reach and he'd whip a fork out of his pocket and help himself. I guarantee it, no one else could get away with that crap.

Inmates have self-designated spaces where their chairs are placed. If you are provided a chair and bring it inside the television room, do not be surprised if someone asks you to move, particularly if your seat is close to the television or placed where you can get a good view. You will be sitting in "their spot." Your safest bet is to ask if a certain area on the floor belongs to anyone else prior to setting down your chair. Prisoners will fight to maintain their designated spot, which is treated like a plot of land they have earned.

You will earn the right to a better spot on the floor as inmates transfer out of your housing unit. It may take months or years, depending on the average length of time inmates spend in your unit. Please become a respectful

viewer in the television room to avoid unnecessary consequences, especially in the medium and maximum facilities.

One of the weirdest things I saw while on the inside had to do with a guy who was extremely annoying while we tried to watch TV. How he didn't get beat to a pulp more often was beyond me. In the county jail in Freehold, New Jersey, there was one television on my wing, C-Right, which the thirty inmates viewed through their cell bars. A young black man named Cason would watch the clock closely, preparing himself for certain television shows he knew were about to air—more specifically, preparing himself for the actresses he fantasized about. He'd be primed and ready for *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*, claiming Jasmine Guy or Lisa Bonet were about to go on a date with him. As soon as the opening credits for his favorite shows were on the screen, he'd hop up onto his top bunk. In full view of everyone, he'd lie on his back, feet on his mattress with his knees up, put the blanket over himself, and without any embarrassment would start masturbating as soon as the female actress appeared on screen. Other inmates would yell, "Come on Cason, go to the bathroom!" Without stopping, he'd yell with glee, "This is my dick!"

He might have been able to get away with that in a county jail, but that kind of thing would never fly in prison. If you do cause problems during movie night or a popular TV show, the prisoners will be upset and react immediately—but so will the guards. They will not be thrilled to have to deal with the upheaval, but they're also going to be pissed when their own viewing is interrupted. You do not want to irritate the guards, my friend.

Corrections officers are hired to do a job, and for the most part they will not cause trouble intentionally. But there are some who will write you up with little to no provocation, so it is best to do what you're told and not draw attention to yourself. Word of any disobedience will be spread to other staff members, making your life inside more miserable than it already is. Officers who work the shift after a reported incident may do things like toss items around in your locker, delay informing you a visitor has arrived, or hold your mail longer than necessary. Anything to make you frustrated, angry, and resentful while reinforcing their authority.

If you have a run-in with a CO on a power trip, chances are high that others within the institution know the officer in question is a nutcase. However, you are an inmate, which means you are expected to follow instructions whether reasonable or unreasonable. This occurs more often in

lower security prisons, because the mentality of the officers reflects the ill-mannered local community outside of prison. Staff members in your correctional institution are supposed to be united, there to keep you safe and in line. However, power-hungry or sadistic correctional officers slip through the cracks sometimes, as do greedy stockbrokers, corrupt police officers, immoral teachers, evil doctors, and depraved coaches on the outside. Bad apples show up in every tree.

While socializing has its harms, it is more harmful if you are kept away from human interaction, like in Ad Seg or solitary confinement. In The Hole, it takes a special breed of person who can take their mind elsewhere minute in, minute out, hour in, hour out, day, week, month, or year, in and out. The best part of an isolated inmate's day is usually when the book cart comes by, pushed by a convict who has been in The Hole a long time and due to be released back into general population soon, meaning he's an inmate who has earned the trust of officers and poses no threat.

Many cope with solitary confinement by suddenly turning to God or Allah, spending time in prayer and immersing themselves in a Bible. For entertainment, makeshift chess sets can be made out of toilet paper while the chessboard is drawn on the floor—players will then call out their moves to opponents in another cell. Some inmates workout in their cells several times per day, but hopefully take breaks to read or do something else that also exercises the brain.

Information and goods can be transmitted cell to cell if you're patient and pay attention. Fishing lines are made out of torn thread from bedsheets or clothing, which is then used to exchange photos, shanks, reading material, or food items while the officers are occupied.

In order to go “fishing” on isolation row, you will push or slide your line so it's near the recipient's door, he will pull your line under his door, and then tie the goods onto your line so that you can draw it back into your cell. Stamps are like cash and probably the most exchanged item on the tier. If you've got a good aim, you can even take a piece of soap, flatten it, and then shove it so it slides underneath a neighboring cell door. If the gap at the bottom of the door is at least a half inch, bigger things can be exchanged; pretzels, potato chips, Honey Buns, and candy bars are smashed flat so they can fit.

However, if convicts are caught using fishing lines, officers may make the inmates move to a different room, or strip search them for contraband,

or tear their cells apart and confiscate anything that might bring comfort in The Hole.

This especially sucks if it's winter, because some administrative segregation cells can be very cold and inmates use wet toilet paper to clog the air vents, but if an officer comes in and sees the obstruction, he'll remove it. Fort Dix and Fairton are two prisons with cold cells in administrative segregation almost all year-round. Atlanta Penitentiary, on the other hand, has warm rooms because of extremely hot pipes running through each cell—hot enough that I could make hot chocolate in the evenings. I'd order the chocolate from commissary, get water out of the ancient sink in my cell, using my paper cup from lunch, and mix in the hot chocolate powder. Then I'd use my sock to gently tie the cup around the hot pipe. After twenty to thirty minutes, the drink would be piping hot.

You may have seen movies where convicts will talk to fellow inmates through air vents. That actually works! If the vents are placed in just the right way, you can talk to the guy in the next cell. And if the vents don't work, a toilet can sometimes transmit muffled tones. Worth the effort, anyway.

Wherever you're at in the building, hopefully you can safely, and smartly, find a way to make contact with another human being. It's important to try.

# CHAPTER 10

## Sleeping in a Cell

8 P.M.

YOU'VE PROBABLY BENT a few errant bedsprings into place trying to make your bed comfortable, and now you've quietly settled down, trying not to disturb your cellie. You've also probably considered giving into the sob lurking at the back of your throat, but your decision to hold it in is the correct one. The poor crying bastard down the hall is about to get a beat down if he doesn't shut the hell up and let everyone sleep.

My first night behind bars was a doozy. The bunk bed was hard as hell. The pillow was thin and the lights were bright. Staring at the gray ceiling, I thought about my daughter. This was stated in the opening chapter. How would I explain this madness to her? I was in Paris, Kentucky, in a county jail with just as many blacks as whites, an oddly even racial divide. I was being held in an open-dorm area with eight metal bunk beds. Below me, my "bunkie" was pretty quiet. He didn't ask many questions at all, which was surprising. It was a good thing, since I wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone.

Crying is off the table. You wanna be all sensitive out in the real world, fine, be my guest. But in prison, that does nothing but send out a flare announcing, "Here lies the weak! Come, beat me!" Plus, it just annoys the crap out of guys who are trying to sleep. Swallow it down, brother.

You are going to face loneliness on a deep level. I know, that seems weird, since you're sharing a room with at least one dude, if not in an open dormitory with fifteen or more guys. And all night long you can hear the hum of men snoring, farting, or talking in their sleep. But believe me, the loneliness will come. One of my friends just showed me a letter I wrote her from when I was in prison, saying, "You've never known what it's like to be alone until you've spent time in jail. Damn! You just cannot fathom what being alone is. Craving is an understatement—but you have to stay focused on the spiritual side of yourself and concentrate on your future."

Fears and doubts will creep in. In that same letter, I said, "I lie in bed and worry about what it's going to be like to share a bed with a woman after sleeping alone for eight and a half years, and at times I wonder if I'll ever make it out of here at all."

Don't let it take you over. Lie back and clear your mind. Don't bother conjuring up images of your "happy place," not for a while, because that'll probably just depress you more, knowing you won't be going to any sandy beach or backyard hammock anytime soon. But you can settle yourself, breathe in, breathe out, and try not to think. Meditate, pray for your family, or focus solely on your breathing.

You don't have a lot of choices if you're not tired. Reading, of course. Just consider your roommate. Angle the light, if you can, so the light will not bother him. Even when you're flipping pages, do it normally, not like a spastic ten-year-old. If you're anything like one of my old cell mates and you tend to laugh or gasp out loud as you're reading, that habit will have to be curbed immediately.

While on the inside, I discovered a number of books I enjoyed, some that even changed my way of thinking. I highly, highly suggest you read Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he talks about finding meaning during the worst moments, and how no one controls your mind but you even when others are trying to break your spirit. You can respond to hate with more hate and anger, or you can respond with patience and forbearance.

Here are a few more books I recommend: Chin-Ning Chu's *Thick Face Black Heart*, Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*, Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society's *Mankind's Search for God, Knowledge that Leads to Everlasting Life, What Does The Bible Really Teach*, Stephen Covey's *Principle-Centered Leadership*, George G. M. James's *Stolen*

*Legacy*, Dr. Naim Akbar's *Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery, Visions for Black Men*, Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*, Donald Trump's *The Art of the Deal*, Pat Riley's *The Winner Within*, Will Durant's *The Pleasures of Philosophy*, Dr. John Coleman's *The Conspirator's Hierarchy: The Committee of 300*, Milton William Cooper's *Behold a Pale Horse*.

Writing is also a great option. Many famous authors have penned their opus from a jail cell, including Miguel de Cervantes (*Don Quijote*), Henry David Thoreau (*Civil Disobedience*), Martin Luther King Jr. (*Letter From Birmingham City Jail*), O'Henry (*Gift of the Magi*), Nelson Mandela (*Conversations with Myself*), Jack London (*The Call of the Wild*). Even Charles Manson, that nutcase, found a publisher for his *The Black White Bus*.

When I was working as the food service clerk in FCI Fort Dix, I had a friend who would ask me to bring him writing pads. I'd never seen anyone use so many writing pads, within hours sometimes. I finally asked him what in the hell he was doing with so much paper and he replied, "I'm writing books." He must've had fifteen or more books written before he was released from prison. One thing for sure, he used his time wisely. Now that he's out, he's still writing, under the name Relentless Aaron, with a mass-market book deal at St. Martin's Press and two movie deals in the works. I was watching *ABC World News* one night in 2006 and was shocked and thrilled when they ran a feature story about him and his jump from prison to published author. We still talk from time to time and congratulate each other on the success we have created, in spite of once being incarcerated.

It is important to note, however, that thanks to serial killer Son of Sam, legislation was passed in the 1970s making it a law that convicts can't collect money from the sale of a book published while they are incarcerated. If you're not a lifer, take a page from Relentless Aaron's playbook, and wait until you get out before you start submitting your great American novel to publishers.

I mentioned journaling earlier. You don't have to write for publication or any audience other than yourself. If you can record your thoughts, feelings, or experiences, maybe it will help you process the anger, fear, and frustration. Or, at the very least, you'll have a record of the crazy stuff that happens and you can leave prison to go write the next *Orange is the New Black*. But consider this: If another inmate decides to go through your

journal, he might not appreciate reading your description of him as the cell moron. Consider using code names and changing descriptions of cell mates.

But eventually you do need to sleep. Sleep will keep you healthy and strong, both mentally and physically. It also gives you an out from boredom. If you can train yourself to fall asleep early, all the better. That gives your mind an extra thirty minutes of freedom where it's not trapped in a six-by-nine-foot cell.

Over 200,000 people in the United States last year made a big mistake, and are now, like you, trapped with 2.3 million other convicts, facing an extremely high price for committing a felony. This price goes way beyond incarceration and humiliation. We convicts lose our place in society, our professional careers, friends and, very often, families. So. What are you going to do about it? You cannot change the past, nor can you give in to the fantasy that society is going to welcome you back with open arms, that all will be forgiven. You're going to have to work to earn trust back. Luckily, the one thing you have is time to do just that.

You can survive prison—maybe even come out a better man. Your choice.

## PART II

# **More Stories and Advice**

# CHAPTER 11

## Juvenile Inmates

**H**OPEFULLY, YOU'RE NOT a teenager about to be sent to an adult prison. Most kids who commit crimes are processed through the juvenile system, which focuses more on rehabilitation than punishment. Most judges will seek alternative sentences to keep a teen out of jail whenever possible, such as ordering probation, parole, or diversionary programs instead of hard time, in the hopes that someone so young can be turned around and go on to lead a normal life.

But if you've done something violent or you're a repeat offender, you very likely have been placed in the adult system, even if you're a few years shy of eighteen.

You must prepare yourself. Your new nickname is "crash dummy" for a good reason.

I know a guy, Damien, who's currently in a state penitentiary. He went in when he was seventeen. His advice for a teen behind bars: "Grow up. And it's best if you do this on your own accord rather than having someone else force you into it, which will happen. When you're living this close to so many people, immaturity isn't accepted. If you try to act tough, someone will test you. Be humble and respectful but defend yourself physically and mentally if you need to."

This ain't juvie. While juvie is its own type of jungle, prison is worse.

My friend LB was convicted of armed robbery and assault at seventeen. With a history of juvenile crime, he was dumped into the adult system and sent to a New Jersey prison, aptly nicknamed Gladiator School—even if you can't fight when you go in, you come out a professional fighter.

He'd been schooled in Prison Culture 101 his whole life, hearing about it from his grandfather and father, and so went in cocky. It did him no favors. LB says:

“When I was young, I was defiant, had a problem with authority. A prime example: It was mealtime, dinner. They were serving inadequate portions. I stepped up and said to the guard, ‘You need to send this tray cart back; the food was cold and there wasn’t enough food on the trays.’ I told the other guys in line behind me not to take trays. The guard was ignoring me. I knocked the cart over, aiming to make them bring more food. They didn’t like that. I was jumped by five guards, pepper sprayed in the face at close range, and then sat in The Hole for six hours with nothing to wash my face. I kind of asked for that one. And that’s the kind of crap that kids do, they got to learn to control their temper.

If I could offer three main pieces of advice to juveniles going into the prison, it’s to mind your business, no gambling, and don’t mess with homos. Those three things will keep you intact. If you gamble and you don’t have any money to pay, what we call gambling on air, you’re going to get hurt. If you don’t mind your own business, if you’re gossipy, you in other people’s business, you gonna’ get hurt. If [you] mess with the homos, you’re drawing attention to yourself and a lot of the guys in the penitentiary that aren’t never going home; they’re out to kill the homos; they’ve got nothing to lose. If you don’t do those three things, more times than not, you won’t have any problems.”

What Damien and LB are telling you is spot-on.

As a younger, smaller person, you need to be savvy about this world you’re about to enter. Personally, I’d ask to be put into a segregated cell block, possibly even solitary, at least until you get the lay of the land. Some institutions are already doing that, keeping the youth in a separate wing or cell block. When you’re in with the general population, take the unspoken rules seriously. No ratting, keep your word, and be respectful. Don’t be chatty; don’t ask people about themselves. Talk about sports and the

weather, that's it, and don't argue. If Big Joe says the sky is green, you say, "Yup." Stay away from the crazies, keep your face neutral, and don't cry. Definitely don't cry. You are no longer a child, and crying only results in mocking. No one is to be trusted; no one cares about your feelings. Your cellie is not your friend. If someone buddies up to you and offers protection, he's got an ulterior motive—from wanting some of your commissary money to sexual favors. Absolutely do not accept gifts from inmates looking to "comfort" you. You'll make acquaintances, maybe even become part of a crew, which is better than being on your own, but always keep it in the back of your mind that they are always going to put their needs first. Most of the people in prison didn't come in as violent criminals, and would choose not to be violent now, but that doesn't mean they won't protect themselves or even attack if provoked.

Your education is your responsibility now. Learn to protect yourself and how to work the system in your particular prison, and make sure you're also staying in touch with the real world. Read. Read everything, especially history and self-help books. Hell, read *The Hunger Games* or *Harry Potter*, or *Chicken Soup for the Prisoner's Soul*, anything that takes your mind to a different place. Sign up for a class. Stupid people don't last long. Your health is also your responsibility now. Mamma is not here to tell you to eat your vegetables and do your homework. Create a schedule for yourself, and a list of weekly goals. Keep your mind occupied and your body healthy.

You, more than anyone, need to pay attention. You must learn to be strong and self-sufficient, wary, invisible. Do not turn to the guards or gangs for protection, not if you can help it. You are used to adult authority figures being there to swoop in and solve problems, but this is not life on the outside. In a prison, you must learn to be self-reliant. A guard will tell you to grow up if you complain to him. They have to respond if you are badly beaten or raped, so make sure you report it, but the daily shoving, racial slurs, mocking, stealing ... you need to figure out how to deal with those on your own. Sit back and figure out when to pick your fights and when to hold your peace. Grow up. Quickly.

I agree with LB, the biggest differences between a teenager and an adult in prison have to do with impulses. A kid who's used to being in trouble is most likely really bad at controlling his mouth or his fists. You have to chill in prison. That's all there is to it. If you show up the first day throwing attitude around, you are going to be beat down. No question.

The over-glorified gangsta lifestyle has landed a lot of hot-headed teens in jail. It's clear kids don't realize a felony charge changes your life forever. You might only be doing a dime, but life will never be simple and free on the outside, not like before. You can't vote, you must admit you are a felon on every job application or legal document, and finding employment is a challenge.

You gave up your childhood the minute you did an adult crime. Even if you're innocent, accept the reality of your situation and make it work. You can do it.

# CHAPTER 12

## The Families

**Y**OU MADE A mistake. A big one. Now your family is paying the consequences right along with you. While this chapter offers advice and stories directed at the people who've been left behind, inmates should read this, too, so you know what your family is facing. Be grateful they're sticking with you.

The arrest and initial separation from the family is devastating. The family is often trying to help their loved one make bail or obtain an attorney. They are stunned and simply will not believe their husband, son, daughter, aunt, or grandmother committed the alleged crime for which they were arrested. The court process is very complex for families that have never experienced a loved one getting locked up. So, they call their best friend or someone who has a family member that's been incarcerated. If their loved one is incarcerated with no money for bail and is the primary breadwinner, everyone is sent scrambling for resources.

I remember sitting in Monmouth County Jail in Freehold, New Jersey, listening to grown men on the phone begging loved ones to contribute money for an attorney. These were the same guys who would hang up the phone dejected, and later brag about how much money they had.

More often than not, families are surprised when their loved one is sentenced. The wealthy will work out a self-surrender date so their family business can be put in order. The poor simply hand the car keys to the

bailiff so their spouse can take the car home. Suddenly, she is worried about a lot of things she never really considered before and her questions can be quite overwhelming. *What prison are they taking him to? When can I visit? How will I get there? Will I make it through this troubling time with only one income now? How is he going to survive all the horror I've seen on television?*

Unfortunately for most spouses, the inmate is escorted out of the courtroom and there's rarely anyone left around to answer those questions.

So, to you loved ones left holding the bag, I hope this next part is helpful.

The early days, right after the initial incarceration, can be over-whelming for not just you, the spouse or partner who has been left behind, but also for your children and extended family. Behavioral issues with the children often take a backseat to financial ramifications, while conflicting emotions of anger, love, fierce loyalty, and sometimes shame need to be sorted out.

Rachel's story is similar to many I hear from the parents of sons or daughters in prison:

“My twenty-five-year-old son has been in and out of some sort of voluntary mental health facility, juvie, then onto jail, now in prison for the past year or so. He was always a smart, creative kid. According to an IQ test, he's near genius level. Pretty good, considering he did not spend any length of time in schooling since probably the sixth grade. He grew up in a small town. Everyone knew our family; his dad was a police officer, second in a family of them.

My son recently told me it was when his dad and I split up and his dad moved into an apartment complex where there were many lower-income people that he really fell into the wrong crowd and started down his drug and alcohol road. He was about thirteen when that happened. There are too many stories to tell of all the dumb things he did, none of them violent crimes, most of them stealing, getting caught, then arguing with the police that would take him away.

After a while, however, it doesn't matter if you try to be good. When you are stuck in the same crowd of people, you fall back into the same patterns. This was Brandon's path. By the time he was old enough to be sent to real jail, it was almost a relief from the daily drama of what he was doing, leaving me constantly in a state of worry. Did he have enough to eat; where

was he living; did he have clean clothes; was today going to be the day I finally [get] that call that he was dead? That he was dead from an overdose or dead from violence related to drugs or something he did, it didn't matter. Every single day, for the longest time, I woke up in the morning and thought to myself, well, made it through another night without a phone call. The small island jail never worried me when he was there. His dad knew enough people to keep an eye on him.

But then he did something stupid again, this time sentenced to his first real prison time. I then had to worry if he would survive that environment. First off, in appearance, he is a white kid. He would be in prison with mostly Hawaiian "locals." He was born and raised in Hawaii but punks wouldn't stop to question him about his past, not when he looked the part of the haole. Second, he had such a hot temper then. He reacted without thinking most of the time. I was worried he would violently react to either an inmate or a guard and cause himself more problems. I was stressed out, day in and day out. It was difficult to think of anything else. I used to worry about him dying in an alley; now I had to worry about him dying behind bars.

At one point during his stint, he decided to get a whole lot of new tattoos, some on his face. I cried when I heard about it, cried harder when I saw it. My handsome son with this tattoo covering the side of his face. Ironically, it was fairly well done, but still, I saw his future plummet. When he got out, that was just going to make it tougher on him. But I finally had to rationalize it with this thought: I did not know what it took to survive that place. Maybe he felt compelled to do it to stay within the protection of a gang. He would not say.

After a time, I could no longer sustain the constant worry. I really did have to adopt the mantra it is what it is, it will be what it will be to get through these times. It doesn't stop me from worrying, but helps me control my anxiety. He has about fifteen months left of his current sentence. He is currently in Arizona. He has grown up some. I finally see a different person. He gets how crappy of a life he has led so far. He gets that he has an addiction problem, gets he cannot even have one drink because it becomes ten. My new worry is that when he gets out, he won't have anyone give him a chance at a real life and that will discourage him and he will go back to what he knows—drugs and numbing his pain.

I do what I can for him. What all parents of convicts should do for their babies, no matter where they are. I stay in touch. I encourage my boy to continue his classes, working toward a college degree, and encourage his positive mental changes. And say a prayer that he will be given an opportunity to be the adult I know he can be."

Another friend who had both of her younger brothers taken away and put in prison echoed Rachel's sentiments regarding the constant, high-level of anxiety and fear, and the importance of staying in touch with the inmate. She says:

"My one brother was sent to an adult prison at sixteen. That deeply impacted my family; we were always concerned, every day, every minute. He was in with murderers and rapists. It was torture for us. We had no way to protect him.

To the families, make sure you visit your loved ones. It can be tough, but you have to do it. They send black men to institutions far away from their families, so the visits will be sparse because of having to travel a really far distance, but you've got to be there for them. After five or six years, you might be burnt out, but it's important to communicate as frequently as possible.

And you're not going just to provide support, but because you need to know what is happening to him in there. You need to go as frequently as you can; at least stay in contact. Make sure you know what's going on behind the walls. If there is unfair treatment happening, you can use your voice from the outside. The prisoners don't have a voice. If your family member or whoever is in trouble, if his life is in jeopardy, you got to be their voice. Again, that's not always easy. You have to figure out how to get complaints up the chain. The guards in the visiting center weren't on our side. They'd prove it every time we went to visit. For instance, we were able to take food to my brother one day a month, but the guards would sometimes do petty things, like handle the food without gloves, stick their fingers down into the slices of pizza, etcetera, doing it to mock us. They just did it because they could, thought it was funny, stupid things like that. They'd treat the visitors, the family members, like they were criminals, too. But you can't let their bullying deter you from visiting, or from doing whatever you can if your brother is in immediate danger."

The government claims they try to place the prisoners within five hundred miles of immediate family but that they are under no obligation to do so.

Holidays are especially hard on families missing a loved one. Try to prepare for this ahead of time, in particular by creating distractions for the younger ones so they won't have time to dwell on the absence at their table. Maybe bring more people together than usual, hosting a feast. Or go the other direction and keep it simple, maybe creating a new tradition that entails going out for Chinese food on Thanksgiving. I do think it needs to be acknowledged early on that you all miss your spouse or child, and you worry about them, but then let it go for the night. Try to celebrate in the moment with what you have.

Some kids are little enough that they don't really understand what is going on. My own daughter, Monae, was only four years old when I first went behind bars. She remembers being confused and wondering why I didn't come to pick her up as I usually did, for my weekly visit. However, Monae does remember clearly coming to see me in the prison's visitation center, which breaks my heart.

Monae says it was awkward, that "there were so many people around, and we only had a certain amount of time. Plus I had to share my time with aunt and any one else who came with us. The room felt like a gymnasium; it was huge, with everybody talking at the same time. I felt safe to a degree, but not really. Like when you first go in, you feel violated with them checking you over closely and using metal detectors. They're not as strict with the children, but it's still stressful, and it's as hard on the kids as it is the adults. I wasn't comfortable at all. I didn't grow up with metal detectors and guards or anything like that.

"I definitely would have had a different relationship with my father if he hadn't gone away for so many years. We'd have had a stronger bond, and I would have had more respect for him when I was younger. When he first came home, he jumped right into the father role. Of course, as a teen, I was like, 'You're not my dad.' I was really rebellious at that point. I wasn't used to having a male authority figure around. My grandmother had raised me. Now, though, we're much closer. We have a good relationship.

"If I could offer any advice to children in this situation, it would be to not just write off what your parent has to say, even when they're talking to you from prison. Try to take advantage of the wisdom he or she has gained, and the advice they can give you. Sometimes that's hard, I know, since you're

thinking in the back of your mind, *Who are you to tell me this when you're the one who messed up.* But you can learn valuable lessons from their experience. I know how I felt, angry and upset with my dad, but you need to understand they are just as angry and upset with themselves for leaving you."

On any given day, there are an estimated 2.7 million children in America with at least one parent in prison or jail. Roughly 40 percent of inmates are married, while around 70 percent were involved in a long-term relationship when they were shipped off. Listed below are some tips for you, the family members and loved ones. A list of links to government and nonprofit resources can be found at the end of this book.

### **Before an inmate self-surrenders**

Prior to self-surrendering, the family will need to collect the inmate's medical information and make copies for his probation officer so that it's in his presentence report (PSI). It would be wise to get your loved one in to see the doctor and a dentist one last time, since the waiting list is long in prison, and the dentists tend to pull teeth rather than give fillings. Some medical devices such as hearing aids, eyeglasses, dentures, wheelchairs, braces, orthopedic/prescription shoes, and artificial limbs are authorized to be brought in with you if medically required and approved by the Health Services Administrator. Any medications for recent surgeries or illnesses need to be documented by your physician. The prison will not make a big stink, particularly if it's in the PSI.

Before your husband, wife, son, or daughter self-surrenders, it is *imperative* you sit down together and go over important documents. You'll likely need to have your name legally added to accounts for things like life insurance, bank accounts, car registrations, wills, and monthly bills. Depending on the length of the sentence, you may want to consider becoming the legal executor, or make sure there is someone placed in that role. Remember, the inmate cannot conduct business from behind bars, so someone else will have to manage stocks or the like. It would be helpful for you to have all of his contact information, including his brokers, accountant, lawyers, and business partners.

## **Mail**

First, obtain the inmate's identification number by visiting the Federal Bureau of Prison's website at [www.bop.gov](http://www.bop.gov) and selecting "Find an Inmate." Search by first and last name to get the institution name, inmate ID number, the mailing address for the institution, and the rules.

When you address the envelope, make sure you include the full name and inmate ID number above the mailing address (which is not always the same as the physical address). Mail is monitored for any items that pose a risk to the security and order of the institution, and for evidence of criminal activity.

## **Books and Magazines**

Newspapers and books can only be sent from a publisher or bookstore. Amazon has been extremely resourceful when it comes to an inmate receiving hardcover books, paperbacks, and magazines. The prison mail room staff will reject material deemed a risk to the security and order of the institution, or any material that facilitates criminal activity.

## **Money**

The federal prison system requires inmates to purchase personal hygiene items, clothing, stationery, food, and stamps from a commissary account. No gifts can be mailed in, other than paperback books and magazines. Western Union is the easiest and quickest way to deposit money. You need the name and inmate register number to use the "Quick Collect Form."

### **Recipient:**

Inmate Name, Inmate Register Number US BOP City Code: FBOP State: DC

Money orders can be mailed to:

Federal Bureau of Prisons Inmate Name, Inmate Register Number P.O. Box 474701  
Des Moines, Iowa 50947-0001

Inmates do not get notification of who deposited the money, so please write a letter with the amount and date of the donation. If a prisoner is

making restitution payments, he or she might lose 50 percent or more of the money you deposit toward their regular financial payments.

**Note:** If your loved one was addicted to drugs, gambling, or other money-squandering habits, those habits will not die easily once in prison. In the Federal Bureau of Prisons, prisoners can spend \$300 per month. Special food items are made available during the months of November and December. During those months the commissary spending limit is raised to \$370. Monthly spending limits do not include over-the-counter medications, copy cards, or postage stamps.

If you suspect your loved one is abusing the money (i.e., gambling, buying drugs) you have been sending them, ask to see a commissary list so you can get a general idea of how the money is being spent.

## **Phone Calls**

You will have to be patient during the first couple of weeks. It takes several days for a newly received prisoner to get an account for outgoing calls. Prisoners can only call phone numbers on a preapproved list. Then it takes at least a week for a new number to be approved.

Phone calls involve long lines and limited times, so prisoners (including you) need to be efficient and plan ahead. Make a list of things you need to cover. Phone calls are limited to fifteen minutes per call, up to three hundred minutes per month. If you talk for a portion of the fifteen-minute limit, the prisoner can't call again for a designated time. When time is up, you will be cut off with no notice and the prisoner will be unable to call the same number again for a designated time. Don't panic if you get disconnected.

The prison has strict rules against three-way calls, and using the speakerphone is considered a violation of the three-way rule. Prisoners can only talk person-to-person.

## **Children**

Much like children of deployed soldiers, the children of prisoners have had a parent removed from the house and put in a dangerous environment for a long period of time. They have no control over the matter. Unlike military kids, however, a convict's children don't hear about what a hero their

mommy or daddy is. Instead, on top of the grief and fear for the adult's safety, they have to live with shame and sometimes fear for their own safety when they're bullied or mocked at school or on the streets for a crime their loved one committed. It's important to stay in tune with your children, making sure they feel secure and loved, and helping them understand that their parent's mistake is not their burden to bear. Some children get insomnia because it was their father who tucked them into bed at night, while others get very clingy no doubt pondering if mommy might disappear like daddy. Speak with the schoolteachers and counselors; make sure they know the situation and will report to you if something happens or it seems that the child is troubled. If you have access to a therapist, even better. There are a handful of nonprofit resources geared toward helping the children of inmates listed at the end of this book.

The spouse or partner of an inmate now serves as mother, father, and single head of household. Her first course of action is to figure out how in the freaking world she's going to explain this mess to the children. She considers saying things like, "daddy is in school," "daddy is at work, far away," or "daddy went into the army." I never wanted my children to believe anything other than the fact that I was in prison for making a bad decision. And, unlike some, I refused to glorify prison as if it were a right of passage. That's insane and a disservice to one's child, as it opens the door for them to many other behavioral issues.

## **Emergency Notification**

If there is an emergency, family can call the institution, but be sure to provide the prisoner's name, inmate number, name of the afflicted family member, name of the hospital or funeral home, and a telephone number. The institution chaplain or unit team or lieutenant's office will notify the prisoner and give him or her a chance to return the phone call. Whether the inmate is granted furlough will be determined by the time remaining on a sentence, an inmate's behavior, the conditions at the site the inmate would be visiting, history of escape by the inmate, etc. The deceased must be immediate family, verified by the inmate's record. An officer or staff member will be present and coordinate with the funeral home director so the inmate is allowed to see the deceased two hours before the funeral, though he will not be allowed to attend the actual service.

## **Visiting (Weekends and Holidays)**

Visitors need to be preapproved by the prison and have established a relationship with the inmate prior to incarceration. Request that a prisoner mail you a visiting form if you are interested in getting on the list. On the day of your visit, arrive at least thirty minutes early to get in line to be processed. It's a shame to waste your visit time in the lobby, so arrive as early as possible and beat the crowd.

Bring \$40 in quarters in a clear bag to spend in the visiting room's vending machines. Lock all other personal belongings in the car except for your ID and car keys. Before you leave home, check the current dress code and visitor regulations for your prisoner's institution at [www.bop.gov](http://www.bop.gov). Items such as underwire bras, open-toed shoes, bare shoulders, hooded sweatshirts, etc., may be prohibited by institutional rules.

You will only have two to three hours to visit, so plan ahead. Write down what you need to talk about. Please keep in mind, your loved one is under constant stress, so coming in with your mouth blazing is only going to ignite a fire. If there is a major issue to be resolved, try to remain calm and deal with it as unemotionally as possible. And, if you can, end the visit on a positive note. The inmate needs to be reminded of why he's working hard to get out, and that he is a human worthy of love and affection. Inmates are usually allowed one hug, and a kiss upon greeting and departing his/her family member.

## **Pre-release Clothing**

Release clothing packages can only be received within the last thirty days of confinement. This clothing will be stored in Receiving and Discharge until the day he leaves. It's important to get your loved one's waist and neck size prior to purchasing any new clothes, as they most likely have changed physically after a long period of time and will want to look presentable and be comfortable.

## **Things To Consider When Your Inmate Is Released**

There are a lot of things to prepare for.

If the inmate is released and happens to be a parent, reestablishing disrupted parent-child relationships can be very challenging. Your role as the disciplinarian changes, in addition to no longer being the sole head of

household or the primary breadwinner. With the father coming home, relinquishing or sharing the responsibilities can be frustrating if egos cannot be put aside.

The father may have issues finding employment, which can harm his sense of self-worth. If you can be patient and supportive, the transition will be much easier.

Most ex-felons find manual labor or other low-paying jobs upon release. He can get away with that in prison because his meals and housing are free. But now he'll be eating, using water for showers, gas for transportation, and other things that ultimately affect the family budget, and he knows it—manual labor jobs just aren't enough. He'll need to be searching for a higher-paying job at the same time, but it's hard when you get turned away. Again, encouragement and patience on your part is key.

While in prison, men love to paint a wonderful picture of the future to their women. They have a magical thinking mentality and truly believe the world will bow down and give them handouts upon release. The world simply doesn't work like that. For instance, if he's never had a driver's license, he must obtain one, and that can be a challenge without any other formal identification. If he's been in prison long enough and had a driver's license prior to incarceration, it must be renewed. You're going to be the driver, running all your errands and his, until that can get taken care of.

His parole/supervised release officer will have a right to search the bedroom of the newly released inmate. That can be a pain in the ass for you, particularly if your husband has a female parole officer. Don't let the situation become catty; she's just doing her job.

For these reasons, many inmates are temporarily released to someone else in the immediate family (i.e., parents, brothers, or sisters). It can help to ease into the transition slowly.

Life can be overwhelming for ex-inmates when faced with things that seem simple to those of us on the outside, things such as choosing what to eat, what time to go to sleep, learning how the Internet works when it comes time to upload your resume, etc. Let me tell you, employment websites like Monster can be frustrating, particularly if an ex-inmate doesn't know how to maneuver from link to link, or even type, so this is another way you can help.

You will have to help keep him calm in public situations. When you go into a supermarket like Walmart, or a McDonalds, etc., it may be tough for

him to keep his composure when people cut in front of him, bump him, or look at him disrespectfully. Saying, “Excuse me, my fault, my bad” is the custom in prison, but not everyone is so careful with physical boundaries in the outside world. Driving a car and having other drivers honk the horn, cuss, and give the middle finger takes some getting used to. His blood literally boils because when that happens in prison both men know where they stand. That kind of display means *let's get ready to kill one another*. These situations only intensify when you or your children are there because of his natural tendency to be a protector.

In prison, he lived in a relatively small world and most likely established an identity inside that was respected. If he had status, like that of an athlete, or of someone knowledgeable in the law, or of a hustler who could make money, it can be frustrating to lose that. The outside world doesn't know him and the prison identity doesn't quite mesh with the real world. I guess the best thing to do here is to be willing to listen—really listen—and offer love without becoming smothering. Working with a couples counselor or talking with your minister is always a good idea, but the most important thing is to maintain an open and honest line of communication while being understanding.

Dealing with these tough issues often inflames the desire to fall back into self-destructive patterns. The lure of drugs and alcohol can be overwhelming for some who have a history of abuse. The peer pressure to get back in with a gang can be strong, especially if they are offering respect to those who served time. And of course, falling in with old friends who would love nothing more than to celebrate his homecoming with a line of cocaine, liquor, or marijuana is all too common. You can't stop him from making these choices, but you can show him that he has a loving home and family that expect him to step up and be there for them, just as you have done for him.

It may be a tough road you're walking, but hopefully you can learn to walk it together.

# CHAPTER 13

## Good Behavior Vs. Bad Behavior

THE GABBY OL' ladies in prison love to stand around and talk about who's getting time off for good behavior. It's true, you can reduce your time on the inside if you stay out of fights and somehow manage to avoid the ire of a guard. But, of course, the opposite is also true. Earn too many Misconduct Tickets and you'll not only end up in The Hole, you'll get years tacked onto your sentence.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) officially calls time off for good behavior Good Conduct Time (GCT) and has made the conditions consistent among all the federal prisons. While the BOP uses a complex formula to figure out exactly how much time you can hope for, the GCT customarily equals about 15 percent of the inmate's sentence. If you go to the Federal Bureau of Prison's website, you can see an inmate's current date of release, as long as you have the correct name spelling and inmate number.

Every federal prison also has to adhere to the bureau's matrix of behavior rules and disciplinary consequences. If you do something wrong, you're going to earn yourself a Misconduct Ticket and it's going in your file, also called your "jacket." Go into another prison anywhere in the United States and pull the same stunt, you should earn the same Misconduct Ticket and penalty. I say "should" because we are dealing with humans here, some

being guards who hate their job. But at least that gives you a baseline. You have a good idea of what to expect wherever you go.

I earned plenty of Tickets in my day. I'd get them for fighting but mostly for petty stuff like not standing for the 4:00 p.m. head count, or having contraband—which usually meant I got caught bringing an orange or a biscuit from the cafeteria back to my cell.

The stupidest reason I ever received a disciplinary sanction was for touching a female officer on the shoulder. I was trying to hand her some paperwork; I delivered Callouts to housing unit officers each day, but one day inmates were crowding the doorway I needed to get through to reach the officer. She was surrounded by people, so I called to her a couple of times but it was very noisy. She had her back to me. I simply tapped her on the shoulder while at the same time extending my hand with the Callout Sheet.

Instead of taking the paper, she recoiled and yelled out, “How dare you! Don’t you touch me!”

I cringed in shock, blown away, with no idea it was a huge no-no to lay a finger on an officer, particularly a female officer. She called another officer to the housing unit then asked for my inmate ID Card. I handed it to her, quietly trying to explain myself, but she didn’t reply and later that evening I was called to the lieutenant’s office. I knew I was in trouble—she was a total nutcase with a reputation for being very petty and confrontational with inmates. I was given a disciplinary sanction, this one a 312 shot, for “insolence toward a staff member.” Lieutenant Hampton dismissed it, however, after several inmates reported they saw me innocently tap her to get her attention. I had not been disrespectful toward her at all. Just another example of how important it is that you pay attention to the unspoken rules. I got lucky that time.

Of course, the greater the severity of your conduct, the harsher the punishment. If you’re caught with tobacco, stealing from another inmate, or cursing at a correctional officer, that CO can write a disciplinary infraction, take away privileges like phone and movie night, change your housing quarters, move you to a less-desirable job, force you to work more hours, or impound your personal items.

If you’re caught fighting, stalking, being in an unauthorized area, or making a sexual proposal or threat, the consequences are even worse—they can put you in solitary for weeks at a time, disallow your ability to receive

Good Conduct Time, recommend more time to your parole board (if you're at a state prison), move you into a maximum security correctional facility, or place you permanently in segregation, where you're in your cell for twenty-three hours a day.

On the other hand, if you're eligible, you'll be facing a parole board at some point.

According to the Department of Justice, some states with inmates serving sentences of less than thirty years may apply for a parole hearing within one hundred and twenty days of entering prison. The law requires the Parole Commission to hold hearings every eighteen to twenty-four months, depending on the length of the sentence. At these hearings, the Commission considers whether or not to adjust your release date. If you've been good, they can reduce your sentence. If you've been bad, or they don't like you at the hearing, well, they can push back your release date. This is why inmates will spend time and money to make sure they walk in looking rested, healthy, and clean-cut, wearing the best clothes they have access to. If family are allowed to be present, they have to abide by a dress code, so ask them to show up dressed as professionally as possible to make a good impression.

Of course, you'll want to make sure you maintain your cool, be polite, and do your best to convince the parole board you are remorseful and that you are going to be a beneficial addition to society. It's always helpful to show the parole board that you are not simply sitting in prison doing absolutely nothing. If you've taken courses, participated in self-help groups, or have a letter of commendation from your job supervisor, make sure you present that information to the parole board members.

Hopefully, you really are remorseful. Life is out there waiting for you.

Good luck.

# Glossary of Prison Terms

## A

**AB:** Aryan Brotherhood.

**Ad-Seg:** Administrative segregation. When a prisoner is placed on Ad-seg, he or she is being investigated. He may have been involved with a fight or caught with contraband and sent to The Hole until the investigation is complete.

**All Day:** A life sentence, as in “I’m doing all day.”

**All Day and a Night:** Life without parole.

**A Wake up:** The day of an inmate’s release.

## B

**Back door parole:** To die in prison.

**Bean Slot:** In solitary/segregation cells, a place in the cell door where food trays are delivered or where an inmate places his or her hands for cuffing before the guards open the door.

**Beating the gums:** Inmate who talks a lot.

**Beef:** A criminal charge, as in “I caught an armed robbery charge,” or a problem with another inmate.

**BGF:** Black Guerilla Family (prison gang).

**Blood:** Primarily African American gang (wears the color red with pride).

**Bo-Bos:** Tennis shoes issued by the prison system.

**Bone Yard:** Area where conjugal visits take place.

**Book:** Twenty postage stamps of the current first-class value.

**Books:** Administratively controlled account ledger that lists each prisoner’s account balance.

**Brake fluid:** Psychiatric meds.

**Buck Fifty:** To get sliced across the face with a knife or razor blade.

**Buck Roger's Time:** A parole or release date so far away that it's difficult to imagine.

**Bug:** A prison staff member considered untrustworthy or unreliable.

**Bug juice:** Intoxicants or depressant drugs.

**Bullet:** One year's time.

**Bum Beef:** A false accusation/charge or wrongful conviction.

**Bum Rap:** An unfair sentence.

**Bunkie:** A bunk mate.

**Burrito Man:** An inmate who has a hustle of making burritos for other inmates.

**Buster:** An inmate who is a fake or untrustworthy.

**Bust Some Z's:** A short sleep period such as a nap.

## C

**Cadillac:** An inmate's bunk.

**Cadillac Job:** An easy or enjoyable inmate work assignment.

**Care Package:** Food or clothing sent from a friend or family member.

**Cat Head:** Hard rolls or biscuits served in the cafeteria.

**Catch a ride:** A request to a friend to get you high.

**Cell Gangster:** An inmate who puts on a tough front or runs his or her mouth when locked in his or her cell but is a coward when interacting with other prisoners in the open.

**Cellie (Celly):** The person with whom an inmate shares a cell.

**Channel Check:** Changing the television channel in the prison dorm.

**Check:** When one inmate scolds another who does not make a rebuttal. If this continues, the person scolded is "in check."

**Check-in:** Someone who has submitted to pressure, intimidation, debts, etc. and no longer feels secure in population and "checks in" to a Protective Custody (PC) unit.

**Chi-mo:** Child-molester, "chester," "baby-raper," "short-eyes," (as, "he has short-eyes," meaning he goes after young kids). The worst of all criminals in the eyes of convicts.

**Chin Check:** To punch another inmate in the jaw to see if he'll fight back.

**Christmas Tree:** A shank that is easy to push in but difficult to pull out.

**Contraband:** Any item in an inmate's possession that the penal institution does not allow.

**Convict:** A longtime inmate, who plays by the "code" of prisoners, is tough, knows the ropes, and does not mislead or lie to other prisoners.

**Cowboy:** A new correctional officer. Cowboy spelled backwards is "yobwoc" or a "young, obnoxious, boy we often con."

**Crips:** Primarily an African American gang (wears the color blue with pride).

**Crow:** Lookout for other inmates committing crimes/rule infractions in a penal facility.

**Cups on the Bar:** Expression used by runners/orderlies in county jails that instructs inmates to put their coffee cups on the cell bar. Coffee will be poured in the cup when the runner/orderly passes by the cell. Inmates will not receive coffee if their cup is not sitting on the bar.

## D

**Dance on the blacktop:** To get stabbed.

**Dap:** A greeting between inmates by hitting the top of one inmate's fist with the bottom of another inmate's fist.

**DC Boys:** A Washington, DC, African American prison gang.

**De-Seg:** Disciplinary Segregation. When an inmate is on De-seg, he or she is in the "hole" for an infraction.

**Diesel Therapy:** A lengthy bus trip or transfer to a faraway facility, or even an incorrect destination, used as punishment or to get rid of troublesome inmates (most often federal inmates).

**Dime:** A ten-year sentence.

**Ding Wing:** A prison's psychiatric unit.

**Dipping in the Kool-Aid:** Jumping in another person's conversation. Being nosy.

**Double Up:** To charge double the principal for a late payment on a drug debt.

**Down:** The amount of time an inmate has been incarcerated.

**Drive By:** When an inmate or C/O walks by a bed or cell while passing gas.

**Driveway:** Front of either a cell or a bunk.

**Dry Snitching:** To inform on another inmate indirectly by talking loudly about their actions, behaving suspiciously in front of correctional officers, or supplying general information to officers without naming names.

**Duck:** A correctional officer who reveals information about other officers or prison staff to inmates.

**Dungeon:** Solitary confinement or De-seg cell where an inmate is kept incarcerated as a disciplinary action for a violation of the institution's rules.

## E

**Ear Hustling:** Trying to listen in on another person's conversation.

**Erasers:** Processed chicken chunks commonly used in prison food.

## F

**Farmero:** Spanish slang for a Nuestra Familia member

**Fire on the Line:** A warning by other inmates indicating that a correctional officer is in the area.

**Fish:** New inmate.

**Fish Kit:** New inmate's blanket, bedroll, sheets, etc.

**Fish Tank:** Intake Center for a prison.

**Flick:** Picture from a magazine or a photograph.

**Four piece or four-piece suit:** A full set of restraints, composed of handcuffs, leg restraints and waist chain, and security boxes to cover the restraints' keyholes.

**Free World:** What inmates call the rest of the world outside of prison.

**Fronting:** Putting up a front about having lots of money, being tough, or having lots of women.

## G

**Gassing:** Throwing feces at a guard or prison employee.

**Get at:** To reach out or contact another inmate.

**Ghetto Penthouse:** The top tier of a cell block.

**Good Time:** Time or merit when a prisoner receives a reduction in sentence for following the prison rules. Federal inmates do not receive good time.

**GP:** General population in a prison. This is where the majority of the inmates are kept rather than solitary confinement.

**Grandma's (Grandma's House):** A prison gang's headquarters or meeting place, or the cell of the gang leader.

**Greener:** Inmate who does not know about prison scams or stealing. Usually new to the prison system.

**Green Light:** To mark an entire gang for death. The green light can also be applied to a single individual.

**Gump:** A homosexual.

## H

**Hack:** A correctional officer.

**Hats And Bats:** Prison goon or riot squad. Generally called in to extract inmates from cells or stop a prison riot.

**Heat Wave:** The attention brought to a group of inmates by the action of one or a few, as in “Joe and John got caught with contraband, and now the whole tier is going through a heat wave.”

**High Class:** Inmate who has Hepatitis C.

**Hold your mud:** To resist snitching at all costs.

**Hole:** An isolation (“segregation”) cell, used as punishment for the most paltry of offenses as well as serious offenses.

**Holla At Ya’:** I will talk to you later.

**Hooch:** Prison alcohol made by inmates. Contains sugar, yeast, and generally orange juice and fruit from the cafeteria, which has been cooking in a container or plastic bags for several days.

**Hung up the gloves:** To defect from a prison gang or organization by entering protective custody.

## I

**In the car:** To scheme with another inmate on a deal.

**Institutionalized:** Long-term inmate who has accepted prison as a way of life.

**Iron Pile:** Weight, weightlifting equipment, a.k.a. “the scrap yard.”

## J

**Jack Book:** A magazine containing pictures of women.

**Jacket:** Prisoner’s information file; also a prisoner’s rap sheet or reputation.

**Jack Mack:** Canned mackerel or other fish available from the prison commissary. Can be used as currency with other inmates or placed in a sock

and used as a weapon.

**Jackrabbit Parole:** To escape from a facility.

**Jigger:** Lookout for other prisoners who are breaking prison rules or committing crimes.

**Jockers:** Aggressive inmates who use other inmates as their “prey.”

**Joint:** Any prison or jail.

**Joto:** Spanish for homosexual or faggot.

**Juice Card:** An inmate’s influence with guards or prisoners to accomplish goals.

**Jungle:** The prison recreation yard.

## K

**Kite:** A letter sent to a person on the outside or another inmate.

## L

**La Eme:** Spanish for the letter “M.” La Eme is the alternate name for the Mexican Mafia.

**Legal Beagle:** Inmate who works in the prison library. This inmate can be a law clerk or paralegal.

**Lifer:** An inmate who will never be released.

**Lockdown:** When all inmates are locked in their cells due to an assault or escape.

**Locker Knocker:** An inmate who is marked as a thief.

**Lock in a sock:** When locks and other contraband are placed in a sock and used as a weapon.

## M

**Mail Call:** Delivery of mail to prisoners.

**Mail Out:** A common practice in prison where drugs are given on credit or one owes money due to a gambling debt. The inmate owing must have his family or friend mail a money order to an address provided by the debtor. Payment must be made within two weeks or the debt doubles.

**Med-Line:** Medication or pill supply line within a prison.

**Money:** Postage stamps that are substituted for cash.

**Monkey Mouth:** A prisoner who goes on and on about nothing.

**Monster:** HIV. Also known as “the Ninja.”

## N

**Nazi Low Riders (NLR):** A white supremacist prison gang.

**Newjack:** Corrections officer or guard who is new to the job.

**Nickel:** Served a prison sentence of five years.

**Ninja Turtles:** Guards dressed in full riot gear. Also known as “hats and bats.”

**No Smoke:** To follow staff’s orders without resisting or causing any problems.

## O

**Old School:** Reference to the way prisons and inmates used to be. He can see a lot but say little. He can make a deal with a handshake. Often they are respected among officers and inmates.

**On Vacation:** When an inmate has been placed in solitary confinement.

**Orderly:** An inmate whose job is to maintain the cleanliness of the housing unit.

**OTC:** Out to court.

**Out-count:** To count an inmate whose whereabouts are accounted for but not in his/her assigned cell.

**Out of Bounds:** Any area inmates are not allowed.

## P

**Packing the rabbit:** Inserting contraband into a body cavity.

**PC:** Protective Custody.

**PC Up:** To enter into protective custody. Generally for sexual offenders or weak inmates.

**Peckerwood:** Usually used by Blacks to describe white inmates.

**Peels:** The orange jumpsuit uniforms worn by prisoners in some facilities.

**Pepsi Generation:** Newer, younger prisoners who lack respect for Old School ways.

**PO:** Parole officer.

**Police:** Corrections officer, guard, or staff of a federal prison facility.

**Popped:** An inmate that has been caught with contraband.

**Prison Wolf:** An inmate who is normally straight on “the outside,” but engages in sexual activity with men while incarcerated.

**Public Pretender:** Public defender. Most inmates do not consider public defenders to be good at their job.

**Punk:** Term for either a homosexual inmate or a weaker inmate who performs as a homosexual for protection.

## R

**Rabbit:** An inmate who has a history of escape attempts or has plans to try to escape.

**Rat:** An inmate who informs on other inmates to corrections officers. Can also be called snitch or stool pigeon.

**Regulate:** A beating administered by thirteen Sureños for thirteen seconds. Sureños is an organization of different Hispanic street gangs.

**Resident:** A Hispanic inmate who is not a gang member but still supports Sureño racial violence.

**Ride with:** To do favors for a fellow convict, often sexual ones, in exchange for protection, contraband, prison currency, or commissary items.

**Ride Leg:** To be friendly with or suck up to staff in order to get favors.

**Road Kill:** Cigarette butts picked up from roadsides by prison work crew. They’re brought back to the facility and the collected tobacco is rerolled with toilet paper to smoke.

**Robocop:** Guard or corrections officer who writes inmates up for any rule infraction possible. A helicopter used to track a person running from law enforcement.

**Rod:** A prison stabbing device similar to an ice pick.

**Rolled it up:** A phrase used to describe an inmate who has entered into protective custody.

**Rollie:** Inmate’s handmade cigarette.

**Run a Make:** To locate and check the credentials of an inmate to see if he’s an informant.

**Runner:** A person who does favors for prisoners, such as smuggling drugs into the institution, relaying messages, etc.

**Running Wild:** Inmate who has a longer time in prison because he must serve consecutive sentences rather than serve all of them at the same time.

## S

**Sally Port:** Secured control area where inmates/guards enter a jail/prison. Can be between two fences or doors.

**Sandwich:** To stab an individual using two or more assailants, thereby sandwiching the target.

**Scam:** A hustle or scheme to obtain something.

**Scandalous:** Can be either unbelievable or so outrageous as to be considered cool or okay.

**Score:** What an inmate obtained from committing a crime.

**Screw:** Guard or correctional officer of a prison.

**Script:** Money. Note: In many prisons, stamps are also used as money.

**Scroll:** A contract by an inmate to get someone.

**Segregation:** Usually SHU or another part of prison where inmates are kept away from the main population and most privileges are taken away.

**Send-Out:** Any monetary transaction in prison where an inmate gets another inmate to make the payment.

**Shakedown:** Search by guards/corrections officers of inmate areas for contraband.

**Shank:** Any object an inmate has made into a knife/shiv/sharpened point.

**Short:** An inmate whose sentence is less than two years or as low as imminent release.

**Short Line:** Line for prison store (commissary) during lunch hours or early lunch for inmates with medical problems.

**Short Timer:** Inmate who will soon be released.

**Shot:** In federal prison, this is an incident report filed against an inmate.

**Shot Caller:** An inmate who represents and speaks for a group within the prison such as a gang, dorm, or racial group.

**SHU:** Secure Housing Unit where problem inmates, such as gang leaders and those who are disruptive, are contained and privileges are mostly suspended.

**Sick Call:** An inmate visiting the medical section of the prison whether for illness, questions, or an appointment.

**Slammed:** An inmate who has been put in solitary confinement or administrative segregation.

**Sleeved:** Any person who has tattoos covering the entire length of his or her arms.

**Sleeves:** Any person who has tattoos from their neck to the wrists.

**Snitch:** Inmate who informs police, prison officials, or authorities about rule breaking by others for a shorter sentence or favors. Also known as a squealer or rat.

**Spook:** In the federal prison system, staff who work in the Gang Intelligence Unit.

**Self PC:** To refuse to go to the yard or come out of your cell but not enter protective custody.

**Shift Gears:** To jerk a knife around in circular motions while it is embedded in the torso of the target in an effort to cause massive trauma and death.

**Skinheads:** A white supremacist group.

**Slocking:** Using an inmate-made weapon consisting of a bag with a heavy object in it to hit another inmate.

**Stainless-Steel Ride:** Death row inmate term for legal injection.

## T

**Take It To The Stall:** Going to the shower area to physically settle disputes by fighting.

**Tank:** A dormitory unit within a prison consisting of ten to twelve inmates. Contains both a day room and a bathroom.

**Tats:** An inmate's tattoos.

**Ten-Minute Move:** Moving between locations within a prison. These times begin at five minutes before the hour and end at five minutes after the hour.

**Three Knee Deep:** To stab someone so that he or she is injured but not killed, usually as a warning.

**Throw down:** A fight between inmates.

**Tio:** Spanish for "uncle." Tio is often used in prison and jail correspondence to indicate that the person being called "Tio" is in fact a Mafia member.

**To have the keys:** To be in a position of leadership.

**Tomahawk:** A jail/prison manufactured slashing type weapon constructed from razor blades and melted plastic stock.

**Toss Salad:** To sexually turn out another inmate by performing oral sex on their anal area.

**Turf:** Gang territory.

**Turn:** To cooperate with law enforcement.

**Turn Out:** To force an individual into homosexual activity.

**Two For One:** A common practice in prison where drugs are provided on credit with the expectancy that the principal debt will be paid back double the value of the drugs.

## U

**UA:** A urinalysis test for drugs.

**UBN:** United Blood Nation, an African American prison gang (wears red with pride).

## W

**Wacked:** High on drugs.

**Walk In:** To allow membership into a gang without initiation.

**Walk the line:** To be an inmate on the general prison population.

**Wearing the brand:** Wearing a gang's tattoo.

**Wolf Tickets:** To talk tough or challenge others, without any intent to back it up with action or violence.

## Y

**Yard:** The recreation area within the prison.

**Yard-In:** The command guards or correctional officers give at the closing of the recreation yard.

**Yard-Out:** Announcement that lets inmates know they can go out to the recreation yard.

**Yolked:** An inmate who is muscular.

## Z

**Zapato:** Spanish for "shoe." Zapato is a slang term used to describe the "SHU" or Security/Segregated Housing Unit.

# Resources for Inmates

[www.fortunesociety.org](http://www.fortunesociety.org) The Fortune Society was established in 1967. Their mission is to support successful reentry after incarceration and promote alternatives to incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of their communities. They do this through promoting the power of individuals to change. I worked for the Fortune Society as a Family Services Counselor and that experience inspired me to form my business, Prison Coach Speaking & Consulting.

[lionheart.org](http://lionheart.org) The Lionheart Foundation is one of the most resourceful organizations an inmate or his family can utilize. They were established in 1992, as a 501[c][3] nonprofit organization dedicated to providing what they call social-emotional learning programs to incarcerated adults, highly at-risk youth, and teen parents in order to significantly alter their life course.

They provide psycho-educational services and rehabilitative resources to be used directly by prisoners and at-risk adolescents; resources and training for professionals who work with these populations in a prevention, rehabilitation, and reentry capacity; and direct social-emotional learning (SEL) programs for adults in prison; at-risk youth in juvenile institutions and public and private programs and schools; and at-risk teen parents in shelters, hospitals, social service agencies, schools, and other community programs.

Lionheart also provides public education based on the need to transform our nation's prisons and juvenile institutions into places where nurturing

emotional (re)habilitation, inspiring positive values, enhancing relationship skills, and imparting behavior patterns necessary for healthy functioning in our communities are primary goals.

[fatherhood-edu.org](http://fatherhood-edu.org) The Fatherhood Educational Institute's "Incarcerated Fathers Project" is a pilot program designed to empower incarcerated fathers to assume emotional, moral, spiritual, psychological, and financial responsibility for their children, both during and after release from incarceration. The goal of the project is to educate fathers in real responsibility, not blame for who and what they are, and to thereby enable fathers to lead healthy and productive lives and create previously unimaginable bonds with their children.

[www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org) The Sentencing Project was founded in 1986. They work for a fair and effective US criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration.

1705 DeSales Street, NW / 8<sup>TH</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC, 20036  
202-268-0871

[www.corrections2community.org](http://www.corrections2community.org) Their mission is to guide each individual from inside the prison system through the release process, and back into their receiving community. They offer direct services and partnerships with other agencies to successfully reintegrate each individual according to needs and geographic area. They recognize that those who receive the skills, training, education, and support necessary to compete in the formal economy are far less likely to recidivate.

[www.nlscoinc.org](http://www.nlscoinc.org) Offers workforce development skills training, workshops (i.e., resume preparation, job searches, interviewing skills, etc.) and job referral services.

[www.felonyfriendly.org](http://www.felonyfriendly.org) They are new, offering access to all relevant felon services, such as: support communities, felon employment services, housing assistance, felon program information, and more.

[projecthopenj.wordpress.com](http://projecthopenj.wordpress.com) The objective of Project H.O.P.E. is to implement a continuum of care for offenders, utilizing evidence-based, cost-effective cognitive, and behavioral science practices to increase offenders' abilities and motivation to demonstrate responsible, crime-free behavior in the community and during employment. Through intensive evidence-based programming, offenders are provided with the tools necessary to become productive members of the community. Project H.O.P.E has also developed partnerships with federal, state, and local agencies to create linkages to resources that provide support to offenders. Intense transition support in the post-release phase of an offenders' incarceration is critical to ensure his or her successful reentry into the community and workplace.

# Resources for Female Inmates

[acwip.wordpress.com](http://acwip.wordpress.com) Action Committee for Women in Prison works to bring fairness and equity into the criminal justice system and to shift the focus to treatment and restorative justice. They educate the public, develop new legislation, implement new programs, and build resources for incarcerated women. They are advocates for the humane and compassionate treatment of all incarcerated women everywhere. They work for the release of women who pose no danger to society, including those who are unjustly imprisoned. They strive to eliminate the overreliance on incarceration, and to develop sane and sensible alternatives to imprisonment.

769 Northwestern Drive  
Claremont, CA 91711  
Email: [info@acwip.net](mailto:info@acwip.net)  
626-710-7543

[womenprisoners.org](http://womenprisoners.org) California Coalition for Women Prisoners, or CCWP, raises public consciousness about the cruel and inhumane conditions under which women in prison live and advocates for positive changes. They promote the leadership of and give voice to women prisoners, former prisoners, and their families.

California Coalition for Women Prisoners  
1540 Market Street Suite 490  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
415-255-7036 Ext 4

[chicagobwp.org](http://chicagobwp.org) The Chicago Books to Women in Prison is a volunteer collective working to distribute books free of charge to women in prison

nationwide. They are dedicated to offering women behind bars the opportunity for self-empowerment, education, and entertainment that reading provides. Incarcerated women send the organization their requests for books directly. They attempt to furnish the requested materials from a stock of donated books. They send three books in each package, and also furnish books directly to prison libraries.

Chicago Books to Women in Prison

c/o RFUMC

4511 N. Hermitage Ave.

Chicago, IL 60640

[chicagobwp@gmail.com](mailto:chicagobwp@gmail.com).

[www.cгла.net](http://www.cгла.net) Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers, or CLAIM, provides legal and educational services to maintain the bond between imprisoned mothers and their children. CLAIM advocates for policies and programs that benefit families of imprisoned mothers and reduce incarceration of women and girls.

CGLA provides both criminal and civil legal services, integrated with social work support, to individuals facing barriers stemming from an encounter with the criminal justice system. They provide services in areas of acute need, including criminal records relief, defense, family and housing law. They partner with scores of law firms, corporate legal departments, and law schools to tap thousands of pro bono hours that multiply the impact. They have a Criminal Records Program, Criminal Defense Program, Family Law Program, Housing Law Program and Client Support Services.

CGLA

740 N. Milwaukee

Chicago, IL 60642

312-738-CGLA (2452)

[www.wpaonline.org](http://www.wpaonline.org) Women's Prison Association, or WPA, works with women at all stages of criminal justice involvement. They promote alternatives to incarceration and help women living in the community to avoid arrest or incarceration by making positive changes in their lives. Inside prison and jail, they are a source of support to women and a resource to them as they plan for release. After incarceration, women come to WPA

for help to build the lives they want for themselves and their families in the community—find safe and affordable housing, prepare for job interviews and obtain employment, reunify with their children, comply with criminal justice mandates and live safe and law-abiding lives, access addiction, health, and mental health services, gain peer support from other women and learn household budgeting and skills for daily life.

Women's Prison Association  
110 Second Avenue  
New York, NY 10003  
646-292-7740

Michigan Battered Women's Clemency Project This is a volunteer group working to identify, interview, select and oversee the preparation and filing of clemency petitions for women in Michigan prisons who have been convicted of murder, but who acted in self-defense of an abuser.

National Advocates of Pregnant Women The National Advocates for Pregnant Women (NAPW) works to secure the human and civil rights, health, and welfare of all women, focusing particularly on pregnant and parenting women, and those who are most vulnerable—low-income women, women of color, and drug-using women. NAPW seeks to ensure that women do not lose their constitutional and human rights as a result of pregnancy; that addiction and other health and welfare problems they face during pregnancy are addressed as health issues, not as crimes; that families are not needlessly separated, based on medical misinformation; and that pregnant and parenting women have access to a full range of reproductive health services, as well as nonpunitive drug treatment services.

Northwest Women's Law Center The Northwest Women's Law Center uses the law, one of the most powerful tools in our democratic society, to improve women's social, economic, and legal status. They bring groundbreaking lawsuits to change the law, advocate for legislation that advances women's rights, and educate women and the community about women's legal rights. And they do so on with virtually any issue that affects women, believing that the challenges women face are multidimensional.

Prison Match of NC Prison Match of North Carolina, Inc. provides incarcerated mothers and their children with the support and resources

necessary to maintain and strengthen their family relationships. Prison Match is a nonprofit organization that understands all children need their mothers. They are an organization that helps children spend time with their incarcerated mothers in a warm, homelike setting. Their programs are designed to show these children they were not abandoned and they are loved and worthy.

Redeem-Her Redeem-Her, a New Jersey Nonprofit Corporation, is an inmate and ex-offender directed, self-help, social services organization. Redeem-Her has its roots inside the confines of the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women in Clinton, New Jersey. It was birthed there by inmates who were bold enough to forge a new direction in a place where one is expected only to follow directions; by women who sought to change the culture of the institution to one of cooperation, community, and service.

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was founded in 1915 during World War I, with Jane Addams as its first president. WILPF works to achieve through peaceful means world disarmament, full rights for women, racial and economic justice, an end to all forms of violence, and to establish those political, social, and psychological conditions that can assure peace, freedom, and justice for all. WILPF works to create an environment of political, economic, social and psychological freedom for all members of the human community, so that true peace can be enjoyed by all.

# Resources for the Families of Inmates

[www.bop.gov/](http://www.bop.gov/) The Federal Bureau of Prisons website will be invaluable to family members. Here is where you find out your inmate's identification number, what prison he is in, how to contact or visit him, links to policies and procedures, links to forms you might need, resources for the inmate, reentry information, links for filing a complaint, and administrative contact information.

[forwardtogether.org/](http://forwardtogether.org/) Forward Together is a multiracial organization that works with community leaders and organizations to transform culture and policy to catalyze social change. The mission is to ensure that women, youth, and families have the power and resources they need to reach their full potential. By developing strong leaders, building networks across communities, and implementing innovative campaigns, they are making our mission a reality.

[strongfamiliesmovement.org](http://strongfamiliesmovement.org) Their vision is that every family has the rights, recognition, and resources it needs to thrive. They are engaging hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals in their work to get there.

[nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu](http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu) NRCCFI is the oldest and largest organization in the United States focused on children and families of the incarcerated and programs that serve them. They work toward disseminating accurate and relevant information; guiding the development of family strengthening policy and practice; training, preparing, and inspiring those working in the

field; and including the families in defining the issues and designing solutions.

NRCCFI at Rutgers–Camden 405–7 Cooper St.

Room 103

Camden, NJ 08102

(856) 225–2718

[nrccfi@camden.rutgers.edu](mailto:nrccfi@camden.rutgers.edu)

[www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org) The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit child advocacy organization that has worked relentlessly for more than forty years to ensure a level playing field for all children. They champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty; protect them from abuse and neglect; and ensure their access to health care, quality education, and a moral and spiritual foundation. Supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations, CDF advocates nationwide on behalf of children to ensure children are always a priority.

[www.hopehousedc.org](http://www.hopehousedc.org) Hope House works to create programs that strengthen ties between fathers who are incarcerated in prisons far from home and their families; to advocate for and raise the level of awareness of the general public about inmates and their families and their concerns; to create programs for the children and families of DC prisoners.

Hope House offers programs to prisoners and their families aimed at decreasing recidivism and keeping incarcerated men connected to the community. Not surprisingly, studies have shown that prisoners who remain in contact with their families while incarcerated have a lower recidivism rate.

Hope House DC

PO Box 60682

Washington, DC 20039

202–506–2253

[www.childrenofinmates.org](http://www.childrenofinmates.org) The staff and collaboration of eleven faith-based and professional agencies offer wraparound care coordination services and opportunities to strengthen familial bonds for hundreds of these children, from birth to the age of eighteen, at any given time.

They help this underserved population by using a systematic process to receive referrals of children needing assistance from the community, local law enforcement, jails, and state prisons.

Proactively locating hard-to-find children to ensure they are safe and with a responsible adult caregiver; establishing community-based Care Centers with dedicated staff available to respond to crises facing children and provide them wraparound care coordination by leveraging existing community partnerships and resources; offering counseling and mentoring services to children to reduce their risks for antisocial behaviors, facilitate their stabilization, and improve their developmental progresses; creating opportunities to strengthen bonds between children and their incarcerated parents through quarterly bonding trips to state correctional institutions throughout the state, jail bonding visits, and regular video conferencing; and raising community awareness about the consequences of parental incarceration on children, while concurrently debunking the stigma associated with having an incarcerated parent.

[www.ndmva.org](http://www.ndmva.org) The Children of Incarcerated Parents Mentoring is a national program that was established in 1992. Notre Dame—AmeriCorps's CHIP program provides one-on-one mentoring for children affected by parental incarceration. NDA also partners with area schools and social service agencies to provide educational support for youth and adults.

Parent Organization: Notre Dame Mission Volunteers-AmeriCorps

Address: 403 Markland Ave.

Baltimore, MD 21212

Email: [natloffice@ndmva.org](mailto:natloffice@ndmva.org)

Telephone: 410-532-6864

[http://www.girlscouts.org/who\\_we\\_are/our\\_partners/initiatives/gsbb.asp](http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/our_partners/initiatives/gsbb.asp)

Girl Scouts Beyond Bars is a national program established in 1992. The goals of the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars (GSBB) program are to lessen the impact of parental separation due to incarceration, to foster the personal and social development of girls and their mothers, and to provide girls with the opportunity to participate with their parents in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. Parents and their daughters take an active leadership role in the planning and implementation of Girl Scout program activities and also

participate in facilitated discussions about family life, conflict resolution, and the prevention of violence and drug abuse. After release, parents and daughters can continue to participate in troop meetings in their communities, making Girl Scouting a consistent presence in their lives.

Parent Organization: Girl Scouts of USA

Address: 420 5th Avenue

New York, NY 10018

Telephone: (800) GSUSA 4 U (800-478-7248) or (212) 852-8000